





## Summary

This thesis focuses on pilgrimage (*gnas skor*) to Drakar Drel dzong, a Buddhist holy mountain (*gnas ri*) in a remote area of Amdo, Tibet, in the present day Qinghai Province in the western part of China. The mountain had long been a solitude hermitage and still is a popular pilgrimage site for Tibetan *lamas* and nearby laymen. Pilgrimage to holy mountains was, and still is, significant for the religious, cultural and literary life of Tibet, and even for today's economic climate in Tibet.

This thesis presents the traditional perceptions of the site reflected both in written texts, namely pilgrimage guides (*gnas bshad*), and in the contemporary practices of pilgrimage to Drakar Drel dzong. It specifically talks about an early pilgrimage guide (Guide A) written by a tantric practitioner in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, and newly developed guides (Guides B, C and D), based on the 17<sup>th</sup> century one, edited and composed by contemporary Tibetan lay intellectuals and monks from Drel dzong Monastery. This monastery, which follows the Gelukba tradition, was established in 1923 at the foot of the mountain. The section about the early guide mainly introduces the historical framework of pilgrimage guides and provides an impression of the situation of the mountain in from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In particular, it translates the text and gives comments and analysis on the content. The newly developed pilgrimage guides are in the forms of guidebooks as well as in video forms. They are compared with the early guide. The next section presents the contemporary pilgrimage practice on the mountain led by a majority of nomadic Tibetans all around the areas of the north-eastern region of Amdo. This section describes pilgrimage practices to the mountain and especially the pilgrimage I participated in with a group of local pilgrims in the summer of 2007. The section will compare the written texts and actual practices to generate discussions on concepts of precepts and practice as well as pilgrimage transitions taking place at the site.

Overall, the paper gives an insight into the unique pilgrimage tradition to this particular mountain. The discussion ranges from the written tradition (the Pilgrimage Guides) to contemporary guidebooks and the reality of pilgrimage practice in Amdo Tibetan culture.

## **Acknowledgement**

This thesis is, indeed, more about receiving valuable things for my own than I distribute some contributions to those who had tremendously helped me. By taking this chance, I would like express my gratitude to a number of people who generously supported me throughout this work.

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## Introduction

### Introduction to Pilgrimage, Drakar Drelzong and Objects of the Thesis

‘Pilgrimage’ (*gnas skor*) has long been an important religious practice in Tibet and Tibetan cultural regions across Asia. As indicated in the Tibetan words *gnas* (‘holy place’) and *skor* (‘circle around’), the pilgrimage in a Tibetan context is a circumambulation of holy places. The holy places include man-made sites such as temples and stupas as well as natural sites such as mountains and lakes. The latter sites are seen as the residence of deities blessed by former religious masters. ‘Pilgrims’ (*gnas skor ba*) perform a circumambulation of such holy places, and this is one of the most common expressions of Tibetan religiosity. They visit these natural sites to get blessings, accumulate merits, purify defilements and for other personal reasons.

Drakar Drelzong (Brag dkar sPrel rdzong) is a holy mountain (*gnas ri*) where Amdo Tibetans for generations have sought solitude in the various retreat sites and where they come for the general popular Buddhist pilgrimage circumambulation of the mountain. It is located in Xinghai County, Tsholho (mTsho lho) in the Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Qinghai Province.

(Geography)

Drakar Drelzong (35°35'N 99°59'E) lies in Qinghai Province, China (Fig. 1). The mountain is approximately 5000 meters high. Figure 2 shows the holy mountain in the background. At the foot of the mountain is the monastery. Below the monastery are the dwellings of the monks.



Figure 1: Map of China showing Qinghai Province (shaded brown) and Drakar Drelzong (black dot)<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> See the reference for this map in the bibliography of online sources.



Figure 2: Drakar Dreltzong Mountain and the Monastery.

Historically, Drakar Dreltzong was part of the traditional Tibetan province of Amdo (located in eastern Tibet, presently in Qinghai Province)<sup>2</sup>. It lies to the south of Kokonor Lake (mTsho sngon po)<sup>3</sup> and north of Amye Machen Mountain (A myes rMa chen), the abode of the territorial god of Amdo<sup>4</sup>. According to some written texts (e.g. *Deb ther rgya mtsho*), the spiritual importance of Drakar Dreltzong is equal to that of the holy mountain Tsari, which is believed to be one of the three holiest pilgrimage sites of Tibet (Filibeck 1988, Huber 1997). Drakar Dreltzong is also considered one of the four major sacred Buddhist mountains<sup>5</sup> in the Domel (mDo smad) region of Tibet<sup>6</sup>.

Drakar Dreltzong has its own written tradition about the pilgrimage, contained in so-called pilgrimage guides (*gnas bshad*), similar to other typical pilgrimage guides in Tibet. Such texts were usually written for pilgrims so that they could locate the holy mountains and other sacred sites (Filibeck 1990, Ehrhard 2003).

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<sup>2</sup> Gruschke (2001).

<sup>3</sup> The Tibetan Buddhist name for the lake is Trishok Gyalmo (Khri gshog rGyal mo), which can be translated as ‘the Queen Who Flooded Ten Thousand’, see Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1975:201), Ricard (2001:95-154), and more interesting legends about this lake see Buffetrille (1999:106-12).

<sup>4</sup> Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1975:209-10).

<sup>5</sup> The four major sacred mountains are Drakar Dreltzong, Pula Yangdzong (Phu la Yang rdzong), Shawa Ridzong (Shwa ba Ri rdzong) and Achung Namdzong (A chung gNam rdzong).

<sup>6</sup> Domel refers to Kham and Amdo.

The earliest known pilgrimage guide to Drakar Drel dzong is a text composed sometime in the early to mid-17<sup>th</sup> century by Drigung Henyon Cheeji Drakba ('Bri gung dBu smyon Chos kyi Grags pa, 1597-1659), the saintly madman of Drigung. Based on this early guide, the monastic committee of Drakar Drel dzong Monastery and Tibetan lay intellectuals have composed handbooks and produced a video containing their understandings of this sacred site.

The sacred mountain is a site of popular pilgrimage for ordinary pilgrims and devotees. Pilgrims perform a ritual circumambulation of Drakar Drel dzong Mountain similar to the ones performed at other holy mountains in Tibet (Huber 1999, McKay 1998, Macdonald 1997). Every twelfth year is considered an auspicious time for making pilgrimages to sacred mountains in Tibetan cultural areas. Such auspicious years attract a large number of pilgrims to these holy sites. The most auspicious and benevolent year for Drakar Drel dzong Mountain falls in the Year of the Monkey, according to the Tibetan calendar. The latest 'Great Pilgrimage' (gNas skor chen mo) to Drakar Drel dzong was in 2004, the Wood Monkey Year. The main object of this thesis is to analyse the old, as well as the newly published pilgrimage guides describing Drakar Drel dzong and to study the contemporary pilgrimage practice at the mountain.

My first object is to study the site and its pilgrimage descriptions in the early guide of Drigung Henyon Cheeji Drakba. I will make a preliminary analysis and present my translation of it. It has not been studied, as far as I know, and there are only a few references to it in the works of Tibetan and Western scholars<sup>7</sup>. These scholars have used the text in order to find additional information about former religious masters and the site, such as the life of Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdrol (Zhabs dkar Tshogs drug Rang grol, 1781-1851), a well-known Tibetan yogin (Ricard 2001:204), and as an introduction to the location of Drakar Drel dzong Mountain and Monastery<sup>8</sup>. Since these scholars use this guide only in a cursory manner, there is a need to study it in greater detail in order to gain a better understanding of the particular site of Drakar Drel dzong. It also helps us better understand Tibetan pilgrimage.

The second object of my thesis is to understand how lay intellectuals and modern monks perceive their tradition of pilgrimage by studying recently written pilgrimage guides and audio visual material. It will be interesting to understand these authors' reflections on the

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<sup>7</sup> Matthieu Ricard gave a brief translation of the first verses of the text.

<sup>8</sup> Tsongon Nangtan Tuntsok (mTsho sngon nang bstan mthun tshogs 1999:603-621).

pilgrimage guides to Drakar Dreldzong today. Thus, by studying both old and new guide books I document how the religious and intellectual elite's understanding of Drakar Dreldzong has developed over time.

The third object is to discuss the actual practices of pilgrimage at Drakar Dreldzong. By studying the contemporary pilgrimage practice of ordinary pilgrims I intend to show how they relate to the written descriptions of the sacred place, as well as to document pilgrim practices that are not described in the guides, but rely on oral traditions. Furthermore, it is worth examining present-day changes in the pilgrimage.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

Important work has been done on pilgrimage in various societies by scholars such as Victor Turner (1979), Victor Turner and Edith Turner (1978) and Alan Morinis (1992). Studies of pilgrimage in Tibetan areas have also been carried out by scholars such as Toni Huber and Katia Buffetrille, but there have also been a number of other studies. In the analysis of my material, I will not use any grand theories. Instead I have used a combination of analytical approaches and methods developed by scholars doing historical-philological research and by anthropologists studying contemporary societies.

### *Textual Analysis*

Since this thesis is mainly based on primary texts, i.e. old and new pilgrimage guides, my primary tool is mastering the Tibetan language, and not only standard written Tibetan. In order to understand the texts and audio visual material, understanding Amdowa idioms and expressions as well as the local Amdo-Tibetan social and cultural context is crucial. Since I have grown up in Amdo and Amdo Tibetan is my mother tongue, and since I have studied standard written Tibetan since childhood, I have no problems reading or understanding the primary texts on which my study is based.

### *Precepts and Practice*

Anthropological studies of Theravada Buddhist societies also give important comparative material for the study of Mahāyāna, and in this case Tibetan Buddhist societies. I find Richard Gombrich's concepts of precepts and practice particularly illuminating, and these concepts also apply to pilgrimage to Drakar Dreldzong, since this sacred site has both a written tradition on pilgrimage and a contemporary popular pilgrimage practice. The discrepancies

between the texts and the practices are interesting to study. A thorough study of the texts and the practices of pilgrimage are necessary to understand the perceptions of learned Buddhists and contemporary practitioners. This study intends to illustrate whether the pilgrims' actions differ in significant ways from the pilgrims' routes and pilgrims' behaviour prescribed in the old and new guides. It intends to provide information on Tibetan pilgrimage as it is portrayed in Tibetan literature, as well as on how pilgrimage practices are performed at the actual sacred sites.

## **Methodology**

### Fieldwork

I conducted fieldwork during two months on Drakar Drel dzong Mountain in the summer of 2007. I participated in the pilgrimage at Drakar Drel dzong as an observer. The main objective of this fieldwork was to get a deeper understanding of this site as well as to observe what pilgrims actually say and do at the site. I am interested in questions like: Do the pilgrims actually read the guide books to the sites? If they cannot read, are they acquainted with the content of the guide books? If so, do they follow the instructions of the guide books? What are the contemporary changes?

### Background to the Field Site

Drakar Drel dzong Mountain is largely a nomadic area, approximately 18 kilometres from the local town of Xinghai, and is surrounded by pastures. It lies adjacent to three Tibetan nomadic kin groups (*'brog pa*), respectively Chuzang (*Chu bzang*) to the southeast, Drel tang (*sPrel thang*) to the east and Ngadung (*rNga rdung*) to the south. These three groups are known as the Lhade (*lha sde*), meaning 'villages of the gods' of Drakar Drel dzong. According to government statistics from 1985, the population of Xinghai was 42,832, of which 24,081 were pastoralists (Xinghai bian zuan hui, 2000:5). In the summer of 2007, dozens of 'black tents' (*sbra' nag*) made of yaks' wool were pitched on the lower part of the adjacent mountains and valleys. Yaks are still important for transportation and are a valuable source of income for local families. However, motorcycles and jeeps are becoming increasingly popular in these remote areas.

In 1923, Arol Lobzang Lungtok Tanbe Gyaltzen (A rol bLo bzang Lung rtogs bsTan pa'i rGyal mtshan, 1888-1959), the third reincarnation of the Arol Tulku lineage from the Rebgong (Reb

gong) region of Amdo, founded the monastery Drakar Drel dzong Teesam Yondhan Ling (brag dkar sprel rdzong thos bsam yon tan gling) at the foot of the mountain. The monastery is briefly known as Drel dzong Monastery and belongs to the Gelukba (dGe lugs pa) tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. There were 619 monks at the time when the monastery was forcibly closed in 1958. However, it subsequently reopened in 1962 for a short time till it was completely destroyed during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). The monastery was re-built in 1981 and recruited 250 monks (Xinghai xian bian zuan hui 2000:444). Currently, it consists of 300 monks including thirteen reincarnate lamas.

Drakar Drel dzong was part of the large multi-ethnic region of Kokonor, the north-eastern part of Amdo. Located in Inner Asia, the area played an important political and religious role in Mongol-Tibetan history and was a pivot of the civilisations between the two nations. It has been a meeting point of different cultures as well as a contested territory of Tibetan and Mongolian forces since the seventeenth century, and was a major location for Buddhist religious practitioners from Tibet, Mongolia and China. The Kokonor region was also part of 'Imagined Tibet', a romanticised Tibet portrayed in the works of a number of Western travellers and missionaries (e.g. Ekvall 1939, 1954, Hermanns 1959, 1965). Drakar Drel dzong was and still remains a significant religious place for Tibetan lamas and the laity. Throughout history, prominent Tibetan religious masters have visited the mountain. Tsongkhapa (Tsong kha pa, 1357-1419), the founder of the Geluk school, came here during his journey to Central Tibet, and Shabkar, the great Tibetan yogin, had a retreat site at the mountain, where he composed numerous spiritual songs to the mountain (Ricard 2001:155-204).

### Conducting Fieldwork

Being a young woman born in the neighbouring town Badzong ('Ba' rdzong), I am aware of the challenges and advantages of conducting fieldwork 'at home'. The concepts of emic (glossed as 'insider' or 'subjective' perspective) and etic ('outsider' or 'objective' perspective) are important categories for a native researcher like me to reflect over (Clifford and George 1986). This fieldwork has for me been a process of learning how to be an 'objective' researcher of cultural practices that I have known since childhood and have taken for granted. Yet, the greatest advantage for a native researcher is the natural and easy communication with informants. There are two dialects in the north-eastern part of Amdo: the 'nomadic dialect' (*'brog skad*) and the 'farming dialect' (*rong skad*). The nomadic dialect is spoken by the Tibetan nomads (*'brog pa*), while the latter is spoken by Tibetan farmers



(*rong pa*). The nomads and the farmers can communicate with each other easily, since their dialects only have minor differences in accent and local expressions. The local people around Drakar Dreldzong and I share the nomadic dialect. The language *interaction* thus provides me with an easy way to communicate with my informants. My education at public schools taught me how to read Tibetan texts, and also enabled me to exchange ideas with learned monks and intellectuals, who have also been my informants during my fieldwork. Since my Tibetan dialect is Amdo *kee* (A mdo skad), I have chosen to give the phonetic transcription throughout the thesis in this Tibetan dialect, particularly the local people's spoken language in the area.

The initial goal of this fieldwork was to find out as much as possible about the practice of pilgrimage to Drakar Dreldzong Mountain. This material supplements the information extracted from the texts that will be described below. Besides participating in the pilgrimage, and observing pilgrims' behaviour, I have conducted formal and informal interviews with local people from different walks of life. I have conducted formal interviews with ten pilgrims. The ten pilgrims include two monks, one guardian (male) of the mountain, one young woman and two elder woman from Labrang (bLa brang), the eastern part of Amdo; one pregnant woman from the Ngadung, one of the three nomadic groups of Lhade adjacent to Drakar Dreldzong; one married man with his family from the farming area of Chika (Khri ka), an adjacent town, and an former pilgrim from Nakza, a village in Badzong. The two monks were from the Dreldzong Monastery. The guardian of the mountain protects the wildlife and pilgrimage routes from hunters. I was informed that he was appointed by the three Lhade.

### Primary Textual Sources

The main data for this thesis are provided by an intensive study of three different types of Tibetan pilgrimage guides to Drakar Dreldzong: an early pilgrimage guide (Guide A), two recently written guide books (Guides B and C) and a video guide. These Tibetan texts are the main source for my study. Guides B and C are written in modern Tibetan and Chinese translations. The video guide is audio-visual using shots of scenery and the sacred spots as well as music, song and commentary.

## Availability

### 1) An Early Pilgrimage Guide (Guide A)

Guide A is entitled ‘Pilgrimage Guide to Drakar Drel dzong’ (*Brag dkar sprel rdzong gi dkar chag*)<sup>9</sup>. It was written by Drigung Henyon Cheeji Drakba. Since the original manuscript of this guide was lost, the current text is the original text quoted in *Deb ther rgya mtsho* by the Tibetan lama Drakgon Konchog Tenba Rabjee (Brag dgon dKon mchog bTsan pa Rab rgyas, 1800-1866). This work is a description of the religious history of sacred places and geographic locations in the Domel regions of Tibet. The text has been reprinted in Tibet, China and overseas by a number of editors. We can find Guide A in all the recent publications and it is readily available. *Deb ther rgya mtsho* was reprinted by the Kansu Nationalities Printing House under the title of *mDo smad chos 'byung* (Lanzhou: 1982), where Guide A is inserted (p. 217-21). Guide A can be found elsewhere<sup>10</sup>. A Tibetan scholar living in France, Yondhan Gyatso (Yon tan rGya mtsho), who published it as *A mdo Chos 'byung*, produced a more detailed edition (Paris 1974, p. 61-68). The Indian scholar Lokesh Chandra edited the work with an English title: *The Ocean Annals of Amdo* (New Delhi 1975).

### 2) New Guide Books (Guides B and C)

Guide B is ‘A Brief Guide-book to the Sacred Spot Drakar Drel dzong in Domel called the Nectar for the Ears of Pious Devotees’ (*Yul mdo smad kyi gnas mchog brag dkar sprel rdzong gi gnas bshad rags bsdus dad ldan rna ba'i bdud rtsi zhes bya ba bzhugs so*), and even bears a Chinese subtitle, ‘The Sacred Place of Drakar Drel dzong in Amdo’ (*An duo sheng di zhai gai sai zong gai shuo*). They were written recently, in 2004. Guide B was edited by two intellectuals, Samdrub Tsering (bSam grub Tshe ring) and Banlhun (Pad lhun).

Guide C was written by a monastic committee from Drel dzong Monastery. It is entitled ‘Pilgrimage Guide to Drakar Drel dzong, One of the Four Greatest Sites in Domel’ (*mDo smad rdzong bzhi'i ya gyal brag dkar sprel rdzong gi gnas mjal lam yig*). It is a 53-page modern printing, and published in 2004. It states that the guide is written as a handbook for ordinary pilgrims visiting the mountain.

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<sup>9</sup> I provide an English translation to the title of each pilgrimage guide followed by the Tibetan transliteration in brackets due to the long Tibetan words in the titles. Meanwhile, I keep the titles of other books and publications in Tibetan transliteration form.

<sup>10</sup> See footnote 8.

### 3) A Video Guide (Guide D)

Guide D, or the video guide, is entitled 'The Magnificent Drel dzong' (*sPrel rdzong gi gzi 'od*) (Ziling: 2004). It was directed by Arol Lobzang Gelek Zangwo (A rol bLo bzang dGe legs bZang bo), the fourth reincarnation and the highest lama at Drel dzong Monastery. It is a unique video which combines local songs, music and interpretations in Tibetan.

### **Ethical Considerations**

I followed the ethical principles outlined by the American Anthropological Association (1990) during my fieldwork. I explained to my informants the reasons of my visit to the area and asked their permissions for the interviews. I have protected their wishes of anonymity. I remember them in a special way in my heart, and will find a way to repay my gratitude to all the people who welcomed and helped me during my fieldwork.

## **Chapter One: Written Tradition, an Early Pilgrimage Guide to Drakar Dreldzong**

This chapter presents an early pilgrimage guide to Drakar Dreldzong (Guide A). Written more than three hundred years ago, the text portrays how the mountain became sacred and describes the specific pilgrimage places found at the site. The text itself can therefore be considered as a written tradition related to this particular mountain. I will introduce a brief historical framework of pilgrimage guides and an introduction to Guide A. This chapter also provides a translation of Guide A, followed by an analytical commentary about the text and its author. As this is probably one of the earliest pilgrimage guides to the mountain, it will give us an indication of how this written tradition differs from new pilgrimage guides to this holy mountain, and this subject will be focused upon in Chapter Two.

### **1.1 Historical Framework**

Pilgrimage guides are texts written by Buddhist monks or lamas on their pilgrimages to holy places such as temples, monasteries, stupas as well as naturally formed objects like lakes and mountains. They describe sacred objects and images found in specific sites. Often the descriptions of naturally formed holy places illustrate the former presence of religious saints who consecrated the sites, their imprints and also of deities and other Buddhist symbols that are believed to be spontaneously formed. In Tibetan, pilgrimage guides carry names such as *lam yig*, *gnas yig*, *dkar chag* and *gnas bshad*. They are considered to be a special literature genre (e.g. Wylie 1965, Newman 1996, Martin 1996).

Most of these texts were written centuries ago and they played, and still play, an important role, enabling pilgrims to recognise the places as sacred and worthy of worship. They help pilgrims to find the routes and places located in the area. This includes introducing the pilgrimage places and instructing pilgrims about their behaviour at specific sites. Thus, pilgrimage guides shape pilgrims' perceptions of the places. And pilgrims use them as a guide for holy places in making pilgrimages. Although they perhaps have not directly read the texts themselves, the content is widely familiar to them through oral tradition, and often from earlier pilgrims and especially the literate ones.

Pilgrimage guides of holy mountains in Tibet are fascinating. These mountains function as

solitude retreat sites and pilgrimage destinations for religious practitioners and Tibetan followers as a whole. In the early history of Tibetan Buddhist schools holy mountains were significant for tantric practitioners. Great *yogins* such as Milareba (Mi la ras pa, 1052-1135) and Shabkar set examples for their future followers in the achievements of spiritual progress on the well-known holy mountains Tsari (rTsa ri), Labshi (La phyi) and Tise (Ti se) in the Himalayan mountain ranges. These mountains in Tibet are universally recognised as the three holiest mountains. Pilgrimage guides to these mountains are largely composed by Kagyulba (bKa' rgyud pa) lamas and disciples, which trace their school back to the school of Milareba. During centuries they have been building a network by sending disciples to the holy mountains. The presence of the school in the three holy places can be traced back to the early twelfth century<sup>11</sup>. Such a religious campaign also reflects some competition with rival schools.

Like these universally recognised holy mountains, the ones in Amdo have also their firm holy mountain worships. For most followers of Amdowas the former mountains are too far to reach due to their geographical position. Many laymen go on pilgrimages to local holy mountains such as Drakar Drel dzong and Amye Machen in Amdo.

Religious intellectuals connect the universal with the local holy places. Local religious practitioners often relate the local holy mountains to the three universally accepted ones. In some pilgrimage guides Drakar Drel dzong is affiliated with Tsari,<sup>12</sup> and Amye Machen Mountain is affiliated with Mount Tise<sup>13</sup>. Linking the local holy mountains to those universal ones is to parallel the same blessings a pilgrim will receive. It is also a way to attract more followers to the local holy mountains.

Despite the different geographical positions, the content of pilgrimage guides to holy mountains is nevertheless in some degree similar to each other. The universal idea of Buddhist interpretations can be found in all pilgrimage guides. They describe the conversion of local gods and goddesses and the consecration of the landscape by a great saint or lama, making the sites accessible to Tibetan followers. They depict pilgrimage routes and the spiritual interpretation of places with spontaneously formed Buddhist symbols, particularly

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<sup>11</sup> Filibeck (1990:1).

<sup>12</sup> This will be discussed in the commentary analysis of Guide A.

<sup>13</sup> Cheeyang Dorje (Chos dbyings rDo rje 1990).

elements of Buddhist tantra such as *maṇḍalas*<sup>14</sup>. Some mountains as a whole are perceived as the *maṇḍalas* of a Buddhist deity (usually that of Cakrasaṃvara) (Huber 2003:392-424, Buffetrille 1997:90). Pilgrimage guides also explain the benefits of specific pilgrimage places on the mountains to make clear to the readers that these places are worth devotion. Holy mountains, according to such texts, are sites for reaching higher Buddhist goals: the pursuit of salvation and the riddance of bad *karma*.

This chapter discusses how Guide A, being one of the pilgrimage guides, describes the Drakar Dreldzong Mountain. As far as I know Guide A has not been studied academically yet, and so I have not been able to find any secondary sources discussing this specific text. Therefore the first step in studying this text is to translate it into English and to annotate and comment on its content. My interest is how this particular text describes the mountain.

## **1.2 Introduction to Guide A and the Early History of Drakar Dreldzong**

Guide A bears the title ‘Pilgrimage Guide to Drakar Dreldzong’ (*Brag dkar sprel rdzong gi dkar chag*). It was composed by Cheeji Drakba (1597-1659), the Saintly Madman from Drigung. Not much is known about the author; I will comment on what is known about the author and his affiliated Tibetan Buddhist school in the fourth section of this chapter.

Guide A is probably the earliest pilgrimage guide to the mountain, written in the early mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. Up till now no earlier texts are known. The guide is written for pilgrims who visit the mountain. The original manuscript is probably lost. The current text is the original text quoted in *Deb ther rgya mtsho*, written by the Tibetan lama Drakgon Konchok Tenba Rabjee (1800-1866). This work was reprinted in Kansu Nationalities Printing House under the title *mDo smad chos 'byung* (Lanzhou 1982); Guide A is inserted in this book (p. 217-221). It is a brief text containing five pages in modern printing.

Relevant information on the early history of the mountain is difficult to find. The following fragmentary sources give an impression of the early situation of the mountain. This includes a general description of the mountain, as well as early yogins’ biographies and other works related to the mountain and religious groups present on the mountain at those periods.

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<sup>14</sup> “This term, which is rendered in Tibetan as *dkyil 'khor*, indicate the central (*dkyil*) and peripheral (*'khor*) deities described in the tantra-texts” (Coleman 1994:342).

From a religious point of view, Drakar Drel dzong is one of the three holiest places in that particular region of Amdo; the other two are respectively Kokonor Lake to the north and Amye Machen Mountain to the south. It is portrayed as a sacred site, filled with blessings equal to those of the sacred land of Tsari, one of the holiest mountains in Tibet. It is also one of the four major Buddhist mountains in Domel.

Drakar Drel dzong was a holy mountain particularly for the Nyingmaba in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This can be learned from Padmasambhava's stories, which were widely spread among the local people. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, however, there were no distinguished schools of followers on the mountain. It was worshipped by all Tibetans. In particular, laymen, unlike ordained religious practitioners, rarely have preferences for a special Buddhist school.

Monastic communities were absent at Drakar Drel dzong in the early 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The mountain was more attractive for tantric practitioners who made their retreat at the site. This can be witnessed from early Tibetan yogins' biographies and other works. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century a yogin known as Nezhi Drubchen (gNas bzhi Grub chen) spent a decade on the mountain to retreat and perform pilgrimages. He was a Nyingmaba follower and he composed a number of devotional verses to the mountain such as the 'Drizzling Nectar Prayers to Drakar Drel dzong' (*Brag dkar sprel rdzong gi 'dod gsol bdud rtsi'i gru char zhes bya ba bzhugs so*). Particularly, the yogin Shabkar, having retreated at the site, mentioned in his biography several names of other yogins who were taking retreat on the mountain.<sup>15</sup> Shabkar followed both the Nyingmaba and the Geluk schools, and he can also be considered as an adherent of 'the eclectic movement' (the Ris med pa)<sup>16</sup>. He composed numerous religious songs to praise the mountain. In one of his songs, he wrote a conversation between his disciples and himself on the issue of building a monastery at Drakar Drel dzong. His disciples requested the master to build a small monastery at the site. And he refused with the following words:

I don't need a small monastery; I already built a big one. Build one like mine, and I promise you a happy old age (Ricard 2001:199).

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<sup>15</sup> Ricard (2001:179-200).

<sup>16</sup> It is a movement led by non-Geluk schools during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as a result of the decline of their schools under the charismatic power of the Geluk school (Dreyfus 2003).

He then continued to sing about his own body as a mountain monastery with compassion and complete renunciation. This conversation and song indicate the spirits of tantric practitioners during that time. Most importantly, it implies that the mountain had no formal religious communities like monasteries during the period of Shabkar (18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century), until the founding of the Drel dzong Monastery in 1923.

### 1.3 Text and Translation of Guide A

In this document I will comment in some depth on the text of Guide A. For the reader's convenience I have included the text (in transliteration, Wylie) as found in *mDo smad chos 'byung* (1982: 217-221), and I have translated the text into English. For the sake of reader-friendliness I indented the text/translation and put the original Tibetan text in italics. In the translation of the text I use the phonetics of the Amdo dialect spoken around Drel dzong areas. Names of Buddhist deities, in particular those commonly found in other sources, are given in Sanskrit. In the process of this translation, I kept to the original text as closely as possible. I do not provide explanations to the background of deities or to terms used in the text unless they are especially important to note.

*ma 'ongs snyigs ma lnga yi dus | |*  
*slob dpon pad ma 'byung gnas nyid | |*  
*khri gshog rgyal mo'i mtsho la phebs | |*  
*mtsho mtha' g.yer mo thang gi dkyil | |*  
*dam sri spun dgu dam la btags | |*  
*bla gter chos gter mang du sbas | |*  
*gnas sgo chos sgo gsal bar mdzad | |*

In the future period of the Five Degenerations,  
 Guru Padmasambhava himself  
 Went to Lake Trishok Gyalmo.<sup>17</sup>  
 In the middle of the Yermo Tang, at the shore,  
 [He] bound the nine vow-breaking sibling demons with an oath.  
 [There he] hid many treasures of *sādhana* and Dharma,  
 [And] opened gates to sacred places and the Dharma.

<sup>17</sup> See (Buffetrille 1999:207-208).



*de nas srod dang tho rangs la | |*  
*srin po khrag gi ral ba can | |*  
*srin mo mi sdug mche ba can | |*  
*de gnyis btsas pa'i 'dre srin bdun | |*  
*bros nas spral rdzong brag la gnas | |*

Then at dusk and dawn,  
A demon with a long mane of blood  
[And] a demoness with nasty fangs  
[And] their seven demon children  
Escaped and stayed at Drel dzong Drak.

*brag phug sgrub pa mdzad pa dang | |*  
*slob dpon dbang drag 'bar ba yis | |*  
*ting nge 'dzin la bzhugs pa'i tshe | |*  
*srin pos brag sgo pha bong bkab | |*  
*rdo rje gsor bas steng nas byon | |*

When meditating in the cave,  
Master remained in a state of *samādhi*,  
Of blazing enchantment and destruction,  
The demon blocked the entrance of the cave with a boulder.  
[Padmasambhava] descended brandishing [his] *vajra*

*ting 'dzin thugs kyis ngang nas kyang | |*  
*'dus mo'i rdzong gi g.yon phyogs kyi | |*  
*brag stod me lce mched 'dra la | |*  
*brag zhabs mun pa 'khrigs pa yi | |*  
*mtshams su ldang nas yod pa la | |*  
*gnam lcags rdo rje brgyab nas kyang | |*  
*thal ba'i rdul phran bzhin du brlags | |*

Even though remaining in *samādhi*,  
 On the left side of the Deemo Dzong,  
 On the upper rock, appeared as a blasting fire,  
 There is a dimming base of the rock,  
 [When the demon] retreated to the border.  
 [Padmasambhava] struck with the thunderbolt *vajra* too,  
 [And] destroyed [the demon] like the dust of dew.

*de ltar bsgral ba'i rjes shul dang* | |  
*srin po pho gdong mo gdong sogs* | |  
*da lta mngon sum gsal bar yod* | |  
*srin po yid kyis smon log bor* | |  
*de yi dbang gis ma 'ongs dus* | |  
*srin pos sprul ba'i mi rnams 'gas* | |  
*chos dang yi ge sgrogs pa dang* | |  
*bstan pa gnod byed tshul 'chal rnams* | |  
*mi snyan sna tshogs byed pa dang* | |  
*bshan pa lag dmar yul 'ga' phung* | |  
*de nyid 'dul ba'i gnyen po ru* | |  
*slob dpon sprel rdzong brag dkar gyi* | |  
*yang rdzong brag gi phug tu bzhugs* | |

In this way traces of such liberation,  
 Faces of male and female demons and so on.  
 Vivid evidence can be found today.  
 The demon gave up evil wishes.  
 Because of that reason, in the future,  
 Some people will be reborn by the demon,  
 [And] preach the Dharma and spells,  
 Immoralities harmful to the Doctrine,  
 All kinds of unpleasant things [they] will commit,  
 The red-handed butchers will occupy some countries.

As an antidote for controlling such incidents,  
The master stayed at Yangdzong Cave  
Of Dreldzong Drakar.

*rdo rje klo dkar pho brang nas | |*  
*sgrub pa mdzad nas bzhugs pa'i tshe | |*  
*lus po mi yi lus po la | |*  
*mgo bo sprel gyi mgo can byung | |*  
*gnas 'di'i srung ma nga yin zer | |*  
*dam la btags nas bstan bsrung bcol | |*  
*dbang bskur dam btags mtshan gsol ba | |*  
*gnyen sprel zla ba chen po'o | |*

In the palace of Dorje Lokar,  
At the time when [Padmasambhava] was meditating,  
A being with a human body  
And a monkey's head appeared,  
And said, 'I am the guardian of this place'.  
[Padamasambhava] bound [him] by an oath and made [him] the protector of the  
Doctrine.  
[He] gave empowerment, bound [the demon] in an oath and gave [him] a name,  
Nyendrel Dawa Chenbo.

*de nas pad ma 'byung gnas kyis | |*  
*ma 'ongs dam sri srin po yi | |*  
*gnod pa mi 'byung smon lam btab | |*  
*gter kha la sogs mang du sbas | |*  
*bsgrub pa'i gtor ma brgyab pa'i tshe | |*  
*zhabs bro la sogs mdzad pa yi | |*  
*zhabs rjes brag la mang du byung | |*  
*phyogs bzhi'i brag la zhabs rjes bzhag | |*  
*lung gsum 'dus pa'i sprel rdzong brag dkar 'di | |*

*sngon dus srin po 'dul ba'i gnas yin pas | |*  
*mtha' 'dul gnas kyi nang nas che ba o | |*

Then Padmasambhava made an aspiration,  
That future harm from the oath-breaking demon  
will not take place.  
[He] hid many treasures and other things.  
When [Padmasambhava] casting offering cake,  
[He] performed the dance and so on,  
His footprints emerged on the rocks in great number  
[And he] left his footprints on the rocks in four directions.  
This Drelzong Drakar, where three valleys meet,  
Was the place where [Padmasambhava] conquered the demon in the past;  
[Therefore it is the] holiest among the border-taming regions.<sup>18</sup>

*gnas mchog rdo rje klo dkar gsal ba'i nang | |*  
*rigs lnga sa bon dbu ma ro rkyang tshul | |*  
*sku gsum yi ge rigs drug skye sgo gcod | |*  
*gu ru sid rdhi rang byon 'bur dod bzhugs | |*  
*de'i nang stod la bde gshegs dkyil 'khor khang | |*  
*'gro na lus rgyan bkrol nas gos srab gyon | |*  
*mar me dpal 'bar bzung nas song gyur te | |*  
*steng gi nam mkha' dag la mjal ba na | |*  
*bde mchog gsang 'dus kyai rdor 'jigs byed sogs | |*  
*rgyud sde bzhi yi dkyil 'khor 'bur dod bzhugs | |*

In the supreme holy place of Dorje Lokar Salwa,  
Five Families and the seed in the manner of *avadhūtī*, *rasanā* and *lalanā*,  
Three bodies [and] six syllables that block the door of rebirth,  
The self-manifested Gurusiddhi rise in relief.  
Inside, at the upper half, is the shrine room of the enlightened ones.

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<sup>18</sup> Here the bordering region seems to refer to Amdo, the area where the mountain of Drakar Drelzong is located; it is the bordering region between Inner Mongolia and the north-eastern part of Tibet.

When entering it, take off ornaments and wear light clothes,  
 Go inside holding a butter lamp and torch.  
 And look above to the open space,  
 [There one can see] Cakrasaṃvara, Guhyasamāja, Hevajra and Yamāntaka and  
 others.  
 And *maṇḍalas* of the four classes of tantras are presented in relief.

*de nas phyir bud g.yon gyi phyogs song dang | |*  
*dag pa shri'i shel gyi phug pa yod | |*  
*mar me dpal 'bar gsal nas der song dang | |*  
*dag pa mkha' spyod dpal gyi tsa ru tra | |*  
*mngon sum lhun gyis grub pa'i gzhal yas khang | |*  
*rang byung 'bur du byon nas bzhugs pa la | |*  
*rong chen bzhi dang mtsho bzhi rang byon bzhugs | |*  
*lha tshogs nyis stong brgyad brgya 'bur dod bzhugs | |*  
*rtse la mkha' 'gro gdong chen bzhi sogs gsal | |*  
*mthong ba tsam gyis ngan song sgo mo 'gags | |*

Then go out and proceed to the left,  
 There is the crystal cave of Dakba Shri  
 Go there with a lighted butter lamp and a torch.  
 In the pure paradise of Khecara and the magnificent Cāritra,  
 [A] divine palace opened miraculously  
 Naturally emerge in relief.  
 There are four big ravines and four lakes, [all] self-manifested,  
 [And] an assembly of two thousand and eight hundred divine beings in relief.  
 At the summit, four animal-headed *ḍākiṇī* and so forth are clearly visible,  
 The gate of the lower rebirths is blocked by merely seeing them.

*de nas phyir bud sngar ltar mar me dang | |*  
*shing ring rtse la dpal 'bar gsal bor byed | |*  
*gong du song dang khang brtsegs gsum tshad la | |*

*bde gshegs thugs sprul bya khyung ga ru ḍa | |*  
*dbu gzengs bar snang dag la 'phyo ba la | |*  
*rwa phrag yid bzhin nor bus spras pa yi | |*  
*nor bu mthong bas dbul phongs sdug bsngal sel | |*  
*gshog pa g.yas g.yon phyogs su brgyang ba la | |*  
*phyag zhabs mjug sgro la sogs gsal bar bzhugs | |*  
*mthong ba tsam gyis klu dang sa bdag sogs | |*  
*gdug pa'i nad rigs kun las grol bar 'gyur | |*

Then come out, like before, with a butter lamp,  
 Light a torch at the end of a long cane of wood,  
 And go up to the third floor,  
 [There's] the bird Garuḍa, the emanation of the mind of the Enlightened One,  
 Raising [its] head and hovering in the sky,  
 Small horns are adorned with a wish-fulfilling jewel.  
 On seeing the jewel, the sufferings of poverty will be dispelled.  
 Wings are stretched out to the right and left,  
 And the feet, tail feathers and so on are clearly visible.  
 By merely seeing [it], one will recover from various  
 Malevolent diseases caused by water and earth spirits

*khyung gi g.yas phyogs sangs rgyas stong sku bzhugs | |*  
*g.yon phyogs 'bri gung 'jig rten gsum mgon bzhugs | |*  
*de yi g.yas phyogs phug pa'i logs ngos kyi | |*  
*zhabs rjes steng nas dpal 'bar yar la bstan | |*  
*dkyil 'khor zhabs nas yar la mjal ba dang | |*  
*'og min chos dbyings pho brang ngo mtshar che | |*  
*phyogs bzhi dbus lnga rgyal ba rigs lnga bzhugs | |*  
*dbus dang phyogs mtshams che mchog rigs lnga bzhugs | |*  
*'di la mthong tshul sna tshogs 'byung bar 'gyur | |*

To the right side of the Garuḍa are one thousand statues of the Buddha;  
 To [the] left is Drigung Jikten Sumgon.

On the right side of that, on the wall of the cave,  
 Hold the torchlight above the footprint,  
 Look up from below the *maṇḍala*,  
 [In] the marvellous Dharmadhātu Palace of Akaniṣṭha,  
 The Five Buddha Families dwell at the centre and in the four directions.  
 The Five Families of the Most Supreme dwell at the centre and in the intermediate  
 directions.  
 There are different perceptions of them.

*de yi phyi logs ngos kyi brag ngo la | |*  
*u rgyan pad ma 'byung gnas gsal bar bzhugs | |*  
*de yi g.yon phyogs bka' brgyad sgrom bu'i tshul | |*  
*chos 'khor gdugs dang tog gis mdzes pa la | |*  
*zhi khro dam pa rigs brgya gsal bar bzhugs | |*  
*de'i g.yon khro bo bcu sogs gsal bar yod | |*  
*de'i g.yon dpal ldan lha mo gsal bar bzhugs | |*  
*zur gyi phug la u rgyan sgrub chu bzhugs | |*  
*'thung dang khros byas nad gdon sdig sgrub dag | |*  
*'di nyid phug la gnas sgo 'di gsum gsal | |*

On the surface of the rock, outside the cave,  
 Padmasambhava from Oḍḍhiyāna<sup>19</sup> is clearly manifested.  
 On the left side are eight teachings appearing like a box,  
 Adorned with the Dharma wheel (*dharmacakra*), umbrella and top.  
 A hundred families of peaceful and wrathful supreme deities dwell clearly;  
 To the left, ten wrathful deities and so are clearly manifested,  
 To its left, Shri Devi dwells vividly.  
 In the innermost corner of the cave is a *sadhāna* spring of Oḍḍhiyāna;  
 Drinking [from] and bathing [in it] will purify diseases, evil spirits, sins and  
 defilements.

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<sup>19</sup> Oḍḍhiyāna is the name of an ancient kingdom, probably in the remote north-west of the Indian subcontinent, where a large corpus of tantric literature is said to have been propagated in the human world for the first time. The land of Oḍḍhiyāna is associated with the great tantric master Padmasambhava in particular (Coleman 1994:355).

In this cave, the doors to the three holy sites are clearly [located].

*de nas phyir thon sgor song g.yas g.yon gyi | |*  
*sgo 'gram phyi rim rgyal chen sde bzhi yod | |*  
*de yi logs gcig g.yon gyi lung pa la | |*  
*phug sgo shar lho mtshams su lta ba yod | |*  
*de yi steng nas yar bltas mjal ba na | |*  
*stag srol thig le brgyad cu'i dkyil 'khor bzhugs | |*

Next go out and reach the gate, and on the right and left  
On the outer walls on the sides of the gate are the Four Great Kings.  
To one side, in the valley on the left,  
There is a cave with an entrance facing the southeast,  
Looking up above it,  
There is the *maṇḍala* of the eighty spheres of Takdrol.

*sgo ngos g.yas la glang po rin chen dang | |*  
*sgo yi steng na jo bo bcu gcig zhal | |*  
*pad ma 'byung gnas bdud rtsi 'khyil ba dang | |*  
*rje btsun mi g.yo la sogs gsal bar bzhugs | |*  
*zur gyi ngos la tshe dpag med mgon dang | |*  
*rdo rje phag mo la sogs gsal bar bzhugs | |*

To the right side of the door is a precious elephant.  
Above the entrance is the eleven-faced Avalokiteśvara<sup>20</sup>,  
[And] Padmasambhava [in his manifestation] as the Coiled Nectar,  
And Venerable Acalā and others are clearly manifested.  
On the surface of the corner, Amitāyus,  
Vajravārāhī and so forth clearly manifested.

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<sup>20</sup> The Tibetan name for the deity is Chenrezig (sPyan ras gzigs).



*sgo zur yel kha' tshul gyis rdo la brdung | |*  
*lha gnas kun tu bsgrag pa'i 'jal dang mtshung | |*  
*zur nas kas gdong gong la yar mjal na | |*  
*spyen ras gzigs dang chos mchog gsal ba dang | |*  
*gza' mchod rwa hu la ni gsal bar yod | |*  
*gnas de'i sgo rnam skabs shig dbye bar 'gyur | |*  
*sgo ngos mthongs la mar ba lo tswa dang | |*  
*dam pa sangs rgyas pa sogs gsal bar bzhugs | |*  
*sgo 'gram bar mtshams steng na u rgyan gyi | |*  
*zhabs rjes rdo yod de la gus par mdzod | |*

At the corner of the entrance, knock on the door with a stone in a careful manner,  
 Since the sound reaches all the heavenly realms; it is like visiting [them].  
 Looking to the upper steps [or to the upper Kedong] from the corner [of the  
 entrance],  
 Avalokiteśvara and Supreme Attribute are clearly visible,  
 [And] Supreme Rāhula and others are manifested clearly.  
 The entrances to the holy place will be opened one time.  
 On the platform attached to the entrance, Marba, the translator,  
 Padamba Sanjee and others are clearly visible.  
 On the middle of the doorway, there is a stone  
 With Padmasambhava's footprint,  
 Please venerate it!

*de nas srib kyi ngos la phug pa ni | |*  
*zhal gyi sgo phyogs byang la lta ba yod | |*  
*der song mar me dpal 'bar sogs khyer na | |*  
*slob dpon pad ma 'byung gnas lhung bzed la | |*  
*rgya yig rang byon mngon sum gsal bar yod | |*  
*bskal ba yar dar kha yar bstan nas yod | |*  
*de 'og bskal ba bar skabs kha bzur yod | |*  
*da lta bskal ba'i snyigs mar sbug nas bzhugs | |*

*dus dang bskal ba'i rtags sogs de las bstan* | |

Then on the shady side [of the mountain] there is a cave,  
With the entrance facing the north;  
Go there carrying a torchlight and butter lamp.  
There is the alms bowl of Guru Padmasambhava,  
On which self-manifested Sanskrit syllables are visible.  
At the beginning of the eon, the opening was [turned] up,  
After that, in the middle of the eon, it was lying [with the opening to the side]  
In the present eon of degeneration, it is turned upside down.  
Signs of time and the world ages and so on are visible on it.

*de nas song bar gshong la mtsho 'khyil yod* | |  
*de yi thur nas yar la song ba'i dus* | |  
*mkha' 'gros phul ba'i tshogs dang mchod pa yod* | |  
*de yi mdun ngos u rgyan bzhugs khri'i tshul* | |  
*de yi 'og tu dpal 'bar gsal ba la* | |  
*gter gyi skrom bu'i steng du gter yig gsal* | |

Then go further, and there is a pond in the basin.  
When ascending from down there,  
[One can see] a feast and offerings bestowed by *dākiṇīs*.  
Its front side appears like the throne of Oḍḍhiyāna,  
Illuminate it with a torch underneath.  
On a treasure chest, treasure letters are visible.

*de nas phar song g.yon phyogs logs ngos la* | |  
*shel gyi brag la g.yu mdog chags pa yod* | |  
*de dkyil steng la sangs rgyas sman bla yi* | |  
*bai d'u rya yi lhung bzed ngos bzhi'i nang* | |  
*rin chen sna tshogs sman gyis bkang nas kyang* | |

*rin chen gser dngul sgrom bu'i nang du rdzongs ||*  
*rgya ni rim pa bdun gyis btab nas bzhugs ||*  
*reg mthong mu ge nad las grol bar 'gyur ||*  
*steng phyogs g.yon ngos rang byon 'bur dod du ||*  
*sangs rgyas sman bla mched brgyad gsal bor bzhugs ||*  
*dug gsum nad sel sangs rgyas sman gyi blas ||*  
*bzhi brgya rtsa bzhi'i nad kun grol bar byed ||*

Then walk on to the wall to the left side,  
There is a crystal rock of turquoise colour,  
Above the centre of it is the Medicine Buddha's  
Lapis lazuli (*vaiḍurya*) alms bowl with four sides,  
Filled with various jewels and medicine,  
And gold and silver are stuffed inside the chest.  
It has been sealed with (into) seven layers.  
One will be liberated from hunger and diseases by touching and seeing [them].  
On the left side above, there are self-manifested [images] in relief clearly visible,  
They are the Eight Medicine Buddhas.  
The Medicine Buddha, the supreme healer of the three poisons and diseases,  
Liberating [one] from the four hundred and four diseases.

*de nas yar song phug pa'i tse [sic] ngos la ||*  
*phug pa cung tsam yod pa der song dang ||*  
*phyogs rnams kun la lha tshogs rang byon bzhugs ||*  
*skyes bu las dag rnams kyis mthong bar 'gyur ||*  
*phal ba rnams kyis de nyid mthong ba dka' ||*

After that, go up to the summit of the cave,  
Enter the smaller cave located there,  
In all directions self-manifested [images of] assembly of divinities dwell,  
Those who have accumulated pure *karma* will be able to see [them],  
While [they are] difficult to perceive for the ordinary ones.

*de nas phyir thon g.yon gyi ngos phyogs na | |*  
*phug sgo shar lho mtshams su lta ba yod | |*  
*de la mar me dpal 'bar gsal khyer na | |*  
*lam gyi g.yas phyogs brag gi ngos logs la | |*  
*drag po phur ba phur srung bcu drug bzhugs | |*

Then come out and on the left side,  
There is a cave entrance facing south-east.  
Bring a bright torch there,  
On the right side of the path, on the surface of the rock,  
Vajrakila and Sixteen Purwa Protectors are manifested.

*de nas yar la rim kyis song ba'i tshe | |*  
*g.yon phyogs ngos la rgyus yod kyis btas na | |*  
*gtsug lag khang dang gzhal yas khang grub la | |*  
*rta babs sgo khang ka ba bzhi sogs gsal | |*  
*chos 'khor gdugs dang rgyal mtshan gsal ba'i dbus | |*  
*thub pa gnas brtan bcu drug lhun grub bzhugs | |*  
*sgo 'gram rgyal chen sde bzhi gsal bar bzhugs | |*  
*phug lam 'dod 'jo ba yi nu ma yod | |*  
*las can rnams la 'o ma dngos su yod | |*  
*'gro ba gang gi khong du de song na | |*  
*tshe 'di 'dod pa'i don rnams yid bzhin 'grub | |*

Then when gradually going upwards,  
If someone familiar [with the place] observes the surface on the left,  
Temples and celestial palaces are formed,  
Archway, porches, four pillars and so on are clearly visible.  
In the centre of the visible wheels [there are] umbrella and victory banner  
And the Sixteen Arhats are spontaneously manifested,  
The Four Great Guardian Kings stay at the gate,  
Along the path to the cave is the bosom of the wishing cow,  
For the fortunate ones milk is really available;

When consumed by whomever,  
All desired wishes for this lifetime will be granted.

*de yi phug song 'dom gsum babs mtshams na | |*  
*dbyar gyi dus su chu 'khyil lam mi thar | |*  
*ston dang rgun [sic] du song na thon tsam yod | |*  
*de na gnas sgo gter kha 'ga' zhig yod | |*

Walking to the end, at the distance of three arm-spans,  
Water flows in summer and the path cannot be crossed.  
It is only possible to cross in autumn and winter,  
There are some treasures and entrances to the holy sites.

*de nas phyir bud lam gyi sgo 'gram la | |*  
*g.yas phyogs bar do'i 'phrang la 'dzul bud na | |*  
*phyi ma bar do'i dngangs skrag zhi bar 'gyur | |*  
*phar tshur brag gi ngos la gnas sgo mang | |*  
*de rnams gter kha mang du yod pa la | |*  
*mjal ba'i bskal ba rang rang las kyis shes | |*

Then walk out and at the path of the doorway,  
Entering the narrow Wardo<sup>21</sup> passage on the right  
Will calm the fears in the Wardo state later.  
There are numerous entrances to holy sites here and there on the rocks.  
And there are many treasures at those [sites],  
The fortune to be able to see [them] depends on one's *karma*.

*shar gyi gnas 'di'i sgo la 'ong ba'i dus | |*  
*sgo 'gram g.yas dang g.yon gyi brag ri ni | |*

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<sup>21</sup> In Central Tibetan the pronunciation is Bardo, but for reasons of consistency I chose Wardo, which is the pronunciation in the local Amdo dialect.

*dar dkar yol ba 'then 'dra gnyis kyi bar | |*  
*nam mkha' mthong tsam yod pa'i g.yas phyogs ngos | |*  
*lho ngos lung pa mgo byang bstan pa yod | |*  
*song dang brag kyang dar phyar 'dra ba'i gnas | |*  
*phug pa kha ni lho ru blta ba yod | |*  
*dpal 'bar gsal bar byas nas mjal ba na | |*  
*rgyal ba byams pa nye ba'i sras brgyad bzhugs | |*

When arriving at the door of this sacred place in the east,  
 There are rocky hills on either side of the entrance,  
 Resembling white silk curtains are stretched between [them],  
 To the right side, the sky is merely visible,  
 There is a valley in the south that leads towards the north,  
 Go there where there is a cliff resembling a hoisted flag.  
 There is a cave facing towards the south.  
 Light the torch and go inside,  
 There stand the Buddha Maitreya and the Eight Bodhisattvas.

*de nas phyir thon lho phyogs ngos logs su | |*  
*lam ngo shes tsam yod pa der song na | |*  
*nub phyogs brag dkar dar phyar lta bu yod | |*  
*de'i ngos phug pa kha shar blta ba yod | |*  
*mar me gsal bar byas nas mjal ba na | |*  
*bde ba can gyi zhing bkod gsal bar bzhugs | |*  
*de yi ngos la rang byon mang du yod | |*

Then come out and go to the southern side,  
 And if one takes the path that is merely recognisable,  
 There is a white rock looking like a hoisted flag in the west,  
 To its side there is a cave facing towards the east.  
 Light a butter lamp and look around, and  
 The landscape of Sukhāvati<sup>22</sup> is clearly visible.

<sup>22</sup> This term refers to the Pure Land of the Buddha Amitabha. The Tibetan name is Dewachen (bDe ba can).

On its surface are many self-manifested [images].

*de phyir skor lam zhugs nas g.yas ngos la | |*  
*mtho ris thar ba'i them skas zhe dgu la | |*  
*gom dor re res 'khor ba rgyab kyis phyogs | |*  
*der thon g.yon phyogs brag ngos spyang ras gzigs | |*  
*rigs kyi bu khyod bde ba can du 'gro | |*  
*zhes gsung lung bstan mos la gsol ba thobs | |*

Come out and go along the circumambulation route, there on the right side,  
[One will see] a path with forty-nine rungs to heaven and liberation.

Every step leaves the cyclic *samsāra* behind

When arriving there, on the rock to the left side,

‘Thee, noble son, go to Sukhāvati;’

Pray [for] Avalokiteśvara’s prophecy with devotion.

*rgyab phyogs spang dang brag gi sgo mtshams su | |*  
*phug sgo yod pa mar me gsal byas nas | |*  
*bcom ldan rnam snang sems dpa' brgyad 'khor bzhugs | |*

On the back side, between the meadow and rock entrance,

There is a cave entrance, light the butter lamp,

[One will see] Victorious Vairocana with eight Bodhisattva disciples stand.

*de nas tshur thad lam la 'ong ba'i dus | |*  
*brag nag 'jigs rung zhig yod de yi steng | |*  
*u rgyan pad ma'i zhabs rjes dngos su yod | |*  
*de nas brag gi gong nas yar song na | |*  
*brag stod me lce 'bar 'dra yod gsham la | |*  
*gshin rje pho dong mo dong 'jig pa yod | |*  
*'dre srin bsgral ba'i rjes shul la sogs yod | |*

*de yi skor lam mtha' yas brag phug gsum | |*  
*ngan song gsum grol gdon sri de la 'dzul | |*

Then when one returns to the path,  
There is a fearsome black rock, on which  
The footprint of Padmasambhava from Oḍḍhiyāna is actually visible.  
If one goes upward from the rock,  
On the foot of the rock, whose upper part resembles a blazing flame,  
There are destroyed faces of male and female Yamas<sup>23</sup>  
And remains of eliminated demons and so forth.  
There are three caves at the end of the circumambulation path,  
Entering there one will be liberated from [rebirth in] the three lower realms

*de nas yar gong rtse la song gyur na | |*  
*khyad par can gyi sgrub gnas mang du yod | |*  
*phug pa'i dbus la u rgyan bzhugs pa la | |*  
*mchod bshams phyag rnga sogs kyi rjes rnams yod | |*  
*brag dmar rin chen shel gyi gzhal yas khang | |*  
*rigs lnga rigs gsum dam pa rigs brgya bzhugs | |*  
*rang snang dag pa rab 'byams gzhal yas su | |*  
*bka' brgyad lha tshogs bdun brgya nyi shu bzhugs | |*  
*phug pa gzhan la rigs lnga'i zhing khams bzhugs | |*  
*lha tshogs bkod pa dpag tu med pa bzhugs | |*  
*gu ru mtshan brgyad la sogs gsal bar bzhugs | |*  
*phyi la rigs gsum mgon po'i snying bo sogs | |*  
*rang byon yi ge la sogs gsal bar bzhugs | |*  
*bsgrub pa bka' brgyad dkyil 'khor yongs rdzogs la | |*  
*sgrom bu dgu bskor gter gnas mang du bzhugs | |*  
*rgyus yod rnams kyis bltas nas blangs gyur na | |*  
*sin dhu ra zhes byang sems dkar dmar yod | |*  
*rang rang 'dod pa gang dgos len rgyu yod | |*  
*lo rgyus gso rig bshad rgyud 'grel bar gsal | |*

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<sup>23</sup> Yama is the Lord of Death.



Then if one climbs to the upper peak,  
 There are numerous extraordinary places for meditation.  
 Padmasambhava resides in the middle of the cave,  
 There are remnants of an altar, a drum and other things.  
 [In the] red rock, the precious crystal palace,  
 The Five Families, Three Families and Supreme Hundred Families reside.  
 In the self-appeared immense palace,  
 Seven hundred and twenty divinities of the Eight Sadhāna Teachings reside.  
 In other caves the divine abodes of the Five Families are present,  
 Countless manifestations of the assembly of deities reside [there],  
 And the eight manifestations of the Guru [Padmasambhava] reside [there] clearly.  
 Outside there is the essence of the Lords of the Three Families and so on,  
 [And] the self-manifested syllables and so on are clearly visible.  
 In the complete mandalas of the Eight Sadhāna Teachings,  
 There are many treasure and holy places fully encircled by chests.  
 If those familiar [with it] look, they can take [from the chests]  
 The white and red bodhicitta, the so-called *sindhurā*,  
 as one's wishes and needs.  
 The story can be found in the explanation of 'The Explanatory Tantra'.

*nub byang mtshams su thar lam them pa'i skas | |*  
*lam gsum bgrod pas sgrib gsum byang bar 'gyur | |*  
*de'i thad smad la gshin rje chos rgyal dang | |*  
*dmyal ba tsha grang bdud srin sgra skad sgrogs | |*  
*blo gsal skye bos dpyad na gsal bar yod | |*  
*'gro dus thal ma gyur ba thon par byang | |*

Between the north and the west is the ladder to liberation.  
 Walking on three paths, one's three obscurations would be removed  
 Right below are the Lord of Death and  
 Hot and cold hells [with] the roaring sounds of demons.  
 [These can be] clearly found if an intelligent person investigates.

When going around, go straight (carefully), without swaying, in order to get through  
[the pilgrimage route]<sup>24</sup>

*gnas sgo g.yon phyogs ri zur gda' ba'i gsham | |*  
*sman chu bdud rtsi ro drug nus ldan 'bab | |*  
*'thung dang khru byas yon dan bcu bdun ster | |*  
*nad gdon sdig sgrib 'dag par the tshom med | |*  
*de nas ri zur phyag rjes la sogs dang | |*  
*rang byon yig 'bru rang gis bltas na gsal | |*

Beneath the mountain corner at the left side of the entrance to the holy site,  
Beneficial medicinal springs with six tastes descends.  
Either drinking or bathing [there] will give seventeen good qualities,  
Without doubts diseases and evil spirits will be washed away.  
Then at the corner of the mountain [there are] handprints and so on,  
And self-manifested syllables can be seen.

*g.yas gyi phyogs su chu bzang brag dkar zhes | |*  
*pho ri dpa' bo rnams kyi bzhugs gnas yin | |*  
*lung pa gcig la rma chen sbom ra dang | |*  
*zhabs rjes gsal ba mi phyugs nad rims grol | |*  
*g.yon gyi phyogs na sbel mo brag ces pa | |*  
*mo ri dpa' mo rnams kyi bzhugs gnas yin | |*  
*mdun gyi phyogs su zhing skyong ral ba can | |*  
*g.yon gyi phyogs su btsun mo brang dmar ma | |*  
*gnyis po bka' srung zhing skyong yab yum yin | |*

To the right (west) is [a mountain] called Chuzang Drakar,  
The male mountain and the abode of heroes.

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<sup>24</sup> This sentence is hard for me to understand. It seems to refer to the dangerous path along the pilgrimage route and I think the meaning is that the pilgrim has to walk carefully; otherwise he or she might have an accident on the steep mountain.

In a valley is Machen Bomra,<sup>25</sup> and  
Footprints are visible; [the deity] liberates human beings and livestock from  
epidemics.  
To the left (east) lies Belmo Drak,  
The female mountain and the abode of heroines.  
In the front (south) is Shingchong Ralwajen,  
To its left is his consort Drangmar Ma,  
Both the Father and Mother, are Dharma protectors and Protectors of the Place .

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<sup>25</sup> See Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1975: 209-210).



## **1.4 Analytical Comments on Guide A and the Author**

Now I will make a brief comment on Guide A based on the translation presented above. I will in the following passages discuss its affiliated schools, major content, the intended readership and the language. The specific analysis of the content will mainly follow the order of the text.

### **1.4.1 Analytical Comments on Guide A**

#### *Affiliated Tibetan Buddhist Schools*

Although a general introduction to the affiliated Tibetan Buddhist school was presented above, the content of Guide A provides details of specific schools that existed at that time. Guide A confirms that the mountain is associated with the Nyingmaba of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. This can be inferred from the detailed descriptions of Padmasambhava, especially about his advent and empowerment of the mountain through various rituals. The text says that he concealed many ‘treasures’ (*gter*) for future generations. Such traditions of hiding treasures, later to be discovered by Tibetan lamas, are methods of transmission in the continuation of the school.

Guide A also indicates the presence of the Kagyul school at the holy mountain. The author wrote about two significant figures of the school: Drigung Jikten Gonbo and Marba, the translator. They founded the Drigung lineage and Kagyul school, respectively. As mentioned earlier, since the twelfth century this school has had a tradition of sending disciples to the holy mountains Tise, Tsari and Labshi in order to spread its lineage and the teachings; Drakar Dreldzong Mountain seems to have similar connections to the school. Although this mountain may not have had the active religious practice during the composition of Guide A, such as were present on the three other holy mountains, it had followers of the Kagyul school. At least there is a strong indication that the author of Guide A was a Kagyulba yogin; I will discuss this in the next section.

#### *Major Points of the Text*

In the specific content of the text, two major elements can be found. One is an account of the process of empowerment of the site, the other are the actual route descriptions. The former describes in a narrative style the advent of Padmasambhava, a common depiction in Tibetan pilgrimage guides. Such descriptions are typical in prophetic literature where Padmasambhava’s arrival to tame local gods is frequently mentioned. According to Buddhist

tradition, before the advent of a great master and his\her empowerment, mountains were the residences of local gods and goddesses, but also they were considered to be land inhabited by demons and evil spirits. These local beings often harmed Buddhist practitioners and brought disasters to the world. They are often labelled as ‘malicious’ and ‘demonic’.<sup>26</sup> The advent of a master to the site was necessary to *tame* them, thus not to *kill* them. The advent of a master is different from the conventional notions of a person’s physical arrival. It can happen through a magical power, often in a manner of ‘magical emanations’ (*rdzu ‘phrul*).

A holy mountain must be initiated by a great saint or lama by transforming the landscape into a Buddhist practice site as he or she has the authority to legitimate the holiness of the mountain. In most of the pilgrimage guides such religious masters are male rather than female<sup>27</sup>. However, saintly women as well as saintly men have contributed to the sacralizations of mountains (the re-sacralization) in Tibetan areas. The most celebrated female tantric practitioner Yeshe Tsogyal (Ye shes mTsho rgyal), who was a principal disciple and consort of Padmasambhava, had concealed many treasures on different holy places, and there are many sacred caves and meditation sites connected with Yeshe Tsogyal in Tibet.<sup>28</sup>

Guide A delineates the advent of master Padmasambhava to Drakar Dreldzong. The following is a detailed analysis of the first part of the text about the process of empowerment initiated by Padmasambhava.

#### *Preliminary Section of Guide A: Empowering the Holy Mountain*

The preliminary section of Guide A firstly deals with the conversion process of the local gods and spirits. It mainly concerns two basic conversions taking place on the mountain. The first is about converting the local faiths into Buddhism. At Lake Troshok Gyalmo, nine vow-breaking demon siblings and the god of the mountain resided there. Padmasambhava subdued the local gods, as the text says ‘bind with an oath’ (*dam la btags pa*). Binding local deities with an oath was a way of converting pre-Buddhist gods into Buddhist ones<sup>29</sup>. The gods were appointed as ‘Dharma protectors’ (*bstan srung*). For instance, the mountain god, Nyendrel Dawa Chenbo, was turned into a Dharma protector. He abandoned his original faith in favour of Buddhism. To convert the local gods certain rituals were used. For example,

<sup>26</sup> See Gyatso (1989:33) for descriptions of Tibetan land before the arrival of Buddhism.

<sup>27</sup> For female religious practitioners and pilgrimages to holy places see Havnevik (1990, 1998, 1999) and Gyatso & Havnevik (2005).

<sup>28</sup> See Dowman (1988), Chan (1994)

<sup>29</sup> See Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1975:1).

Padmasambhava gave empowerment to the mountain god and bestowed him with an initiation name, Nyendrel Dawa Chenbo, similar to the ordination of a disciple by a master.

According to the text, before the advent of Padmasambhava, the mountain was the residence of local beings, described with negative connotations. Guide A denominates them as ‘demons’ (*srin po*) and ‘demonesses’ (*srin mo*). In the text descriptions are given about contestations from these opposing powers, attempting to fight the master. The following description is a summary of the narrative about the mythical war between the master and a demon:

A demon family escaped from Lake Trishog Gyalmo to Drakar Drel dzong when Padmasambhava was conquering the local pre-Buddhist gods. In order to conquer these demons, the master came to Drakar Drel dzong. While meditating in a cave, the demon blocked its entrance with a giant rock. He struck with the thunderbolt, and destroyed the demon (synopsis from p. 217-218).

Such struggles between Padmasambhava and demons forge contrasting images of good and evil. The master represents the good that always triumphs over the evil. This illustrates how Buddhist intellectuals were describing non-Buddhist beings, always ending with the victory of the masters over opposing powers, assimilating or destroying them.

The preliminary section of Guide A also points out the ‘second conversion’ of the mountain. It is typical for Tibetan mountain pilgrimage sites that they are ‘opened’ (*gnas gso byed pa*) by a great master. The notion of ‘opening’ refers to Buddhist practitioners consecrating the sacred sites. This particular mountain was ‘opened’ by Padmasambhava. He consecrated the mountain by performing specific magical rituals at the site. He concealed sacred scriptures and objects like ‘treasures’ in the ground or in caves, and repeatedly recited esoteric rituals to prevent harm and interruptions from harmful forces.

Guide A extensively convinces readers of this master’s empowering of the landscape and offers the legitimation of the site as sacred for Buddhist followers. It mentions a number of physical forms on the mountain related to the master, in particular his naturally formed footprints and other imprints such as caves where he meditated, and holy water that was

blessed by him. His eight manifestations are mentioned, along with the name of his sacred kingdom Oḍḍhiyāna, repeatedly through the text.

This particular way of introducing a holy mountain reveals an early religious practitioner, the author of Guide A, with his perceptions and presents a site as being holy and worthy of worship. It demonstrates how he describes the mountain as an empowered Buddhist mountain through the esoteric process that involves pre-Buddhist pantheons and Buddhist representatives, and the author attempts to convince the reader of the unique way of legitimating the site into a sacred landscape.

#### *Main Section of Guide A: Describing the Pilgrimage Places*

The next part of Guide A mainly describes the specific pilgrimage places. A pilgrimage to a holy mountain is to walk around the site, and in some cases also intermittently prostrate oneself, from a departure point to the exit point, following a clockwise direction (Buddhist tradition). Guide A describes the pilgrimage places in such a direction.

Guide A portrays the elevation or promotion of the mountain with its associations to other well-known holy places. In the text the mountain is described and compared with the three best known holy mountains in Tibet: Tsari, Labshi and Tise, mentioned above. The author intentionally compares such universally recognised holy places with the local mountain. Through these descriptions found in Guide A, it is clear the author wants to convince readers that this particular mountain is equal to those well-known holy mountains. He describes places at Drakar Drelzong Mountain with the same names used at the three universally recognised holy mountains. For instance, the author depicts an actual existence of Tsari in the form of Cāritra, one of the 24 great sacred places described in tantras<sup>30</sup>. In addition he uses a name similar to Pure Crystal Mountain (Dag pa shel ri), in Tsari, to illustrate a peculiar cave (p. 218). And he also describes four big ravines and lakes (rivers) that can be found exactly so in the description of the pilgrimage guide to the Pure Crystal Mountain<sup>31</sup>. In this part, one finds the author's way of elevating this particular mountain with the universal ones.

The author also tries to link the mountain with other holy places in Amdo. He describes Trishok Gyalmo Lake at the beginning of the text, and explains how this lake was made holy

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<sup>30</sup> See Huber (2003).

<sup>31</sup> Ricard (2001:268, note 8).



by Padmasambhava (p. 217). And then he immediately connects this lake to Drakar Dreldzong Mountain in a manner of the mythical interpretations of the demons and demonesses who fled from the lake to the mountain. The author attempts to indicate that Padmasambhava consecrated both the mountain and the lake at the same time. By connecting the lake to the mountain he also demonstrates his aim of promoting the site with all qualities of a holy mountain, often associated with a lake, representing the female and the mountain itself to the male. In addition, Guide A mentions Amye Machen Mountain, the holiest mountain in that region. And there is even a valley which is identified with the naturally formed Amye Machen (p. 221).

Remarkable in the pilgrimage place descriptions of Guide A are the exclusive illustrations of the places in relation to tantric Buddhism. The mountain itself is not considered to be the palace of a specific deity as is the case of some other holy mountains, with all the surrounding hills, valleys and lakes and trees arranged in the shape of a *maṇḍala*. However, the text depicts many pilgrimage places such as caves and rocks that are considered to be in the shape of celestial palaces, *maṇḍalas* and Buddhist deities. To give a few examples from the text: the author writes there are spontaneously formed meditational deities such as Cakrasaṃvara, Guhyasamāja, Hevajra and Yamāntaka; as well as texts describing the *maṇḍalas* of the four classes of tantras (p. 218), and the Eight Sadhāna Teachings (p. 218, 220). The author further claims to have perceived rock manifestations of celestial palaces with archways, porches and four pillars (p. 221). He mentions the Dharma wheel, parasols and victory banners in the centre of the *maṇḍala* with the Sixteen Sthaviras and the Four Great Guardian Kings at the door (p. 220). Sometimes, a cave is considered to be a landscape of Sukhāvātī (p. 219). These descriptions imprint on the readers not only the holiness of the site in the tantric tradition, but also the importance of practicing this tradition so that they could see these spiritual realms and sacred forms.

The text describes a number of pilgrimage places pertaining to the accumulation of merit and purification of defilements. Pilgrimage places around Drakar Dreldzong are considered to be powerful places helping to solve various affairs and desires both for this and the other world. For instance, the author describes the *ḍākiṇī* being able to block one's evil rebirth when one sees it at the peak of the Pure Crystal Cave (p. 218). And Guide A also describes a pilgrimage site said to be a Wardo (*Bar do*) passage (p. 220). It says there is a passage between the rocks where the pilgrim is told to enter this narrow passage so that he or she will not be afraid of

the horrors in the Wardo state (an interval period of experience between death and rebirth)<sup>32</sup>. Another example of merit accumulation: there are three caves at the end of the circumambulation path. By entering them one's bad karma will be reduced and a better rebirth attained. Below the caves are ditches of Yamas who fell into the hot and cold hells (p. 221). The text also describes the purification of defilement and diseases. Occasionally, on the pilgrimage routes, the pilgrim will come across the holy water and the holy springs of Padmasambhava and the Medicine Buddha. They have the magical power to cure all kinds of illnesses and wash away defilements. For example, the Cave of Medicine Buddha is said to have jewels and medicine that cure spiritual poisons such as anger, hatred, delusion and also physical diseases. The text stresses Medicine Buddha as a symbol of curing diseases and purification of defilements. Another example are the medicinal springs with effective medicinal nectar having six tastes, flowing beneath the mountain at the left side of the entrance to the holy site. Either drinking it or bathing in it will bestow seventeen kinds of good qualities (p. 221).

#### *Oriented Readers*

Pilgrimage guides are written for pilgrims, as is Guide A, but in reality these guides are aimed mainly at the Buddhist elites (i.e. intellectuals and tantric practitioners) more than at laymen. Guide A describes both the physical locations of the pilgrimage places and the spiritual interpretations of the Buddhist symbols that are assumed to have been naturally formed at these places. The mundane landscape of the mountain is regarded as a Buddhist spiritual realm with the aforementioned Buddhist deities and symbols. Extraordinary visions must be acquired to gain such perceptions. They are acquired by tantric adepts (*siddhas*) and spiritually progressed lamas. Thus, ordinary pilgrims can hardly see these pilgrimage places as they are described in the text.

The text classifies visitors to the site with regard to their different levels of spiritual progress and *karmic* status. Such classification is common in Buddhist literature, where a person's situation and all affairs are judged on the basis of his or her spiritual realisation and the consequences of actions inherited from previous life (the idea of the cycle of rebirth and *karma*). These notions of classifications are typical in pilgrimage guides. A pilgrim's perception of a pilgrimage place is shaped by his or her spiritual and karmic status. In the text a dichotomy between spiritually advanced masters, who have realised a high spiritual level,

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<sup>32</sup> For a detailed interpretation of this term, see Sogyal Rinpoche (1998).

and ‘ordinary people’ (*skyes bu phal ba*) can be found; ‘those of purified *karma*’ (*lus yad rnam*), and ‘those of lower-birth’ (*skyes sman*)<sup>33</sup>. The pilgrimage places can be seen by spiritually realised people (who have reached a level of meditation through freeing the mind) and people with a high level of *karma*, but they are difficult to be seen by ordinary people. An example of such a description is the following verse (p. 220):

After that, go up to the summit of the cave,  
Enter the small cave located there,  
In all directions self-manifested [images of] assembly of divinities  
dwell,  
Those who have accumulated pure *karma* will be able to see them,  
While they are difficult to perceive for the ordinary ones.

In the last two lines of the verse the text emphasises the level of the cognitive status. The text is in concordance with the basic Buddhist ideas of *karma* and deeds. One’s capability of seeing some special pilgrimage places are measured on the actions one accumulated in both previous lives and the present one.

Another example (p. 220):

Then walk out and at the path of the doorway,  
Entering the narrow Wardo passage on the right  
Will calm the fears in the Wardo state later.  
There are numerous entrances to holy sites here and there on the rocks.  
And there are many treasures at those [sites],  
The fortune to be able to see [them] depends on one’s *karma*.

The text confirms that ordinary pilgrims perceive the sacred places as they are described, and reveal their inferior cognitive and spiritual status. The particular consequence of such hierarchical levels of pilgrims causes the dichotomy between the upper class of the Buddhist elites and the lower class of ordinary pilgrims.

### *Language*

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<sup>33</sup> This is a common term used for women.

Guide A is written in one of those common language style forms of traditional Tibetan literature. In these verses many terms and doctrines of Indian Buddhist, particularly Sanskrit, origin can be found, being typical for Tibetan religious texts. A unique feature of this text is that it is not entirely written in a canonical language, but as a combination of straightforward or ordinary words and Buddhist technical terms. It provides a vivid description of the routes in directing geographical locations of specific pilgrimage places. This helps pilgrims to use the text as a practical guide when visiting the mountain. In my opinion the mountain is located in a specific area. On this mountain there are a number of pilgrimage places. Guide A also gives useful instructions for pilgrims' behaviour at specific pilgrimage places. For example (p. 218):

In the supreme holy place of Dorje Lokar Salwa  
Inside, at the upper half, is the shrine room of the enlightened ones.  
When entering it, take off ornaments and wear light clothes,  
Go inside holding a butter lamp and torch  
And look above to the open space

[There one can see] Cakrasaṃvara, Guhyasamāja, Hevajra and Yamāntaka and others.

And the *maṅḍalas* of the four classes of tantras are presented in relief.

The verse above presents the holy place of Dorje Lokar Salwa by providing practical tips such as taking off clothes and ornaments and holding a lamp while visiting this place. The physical descriptions also include the natural topography over which pilgrims must pass. A good example is the route description to the place of Buddha Maitreya and the Eight Bodhisattvas. The description of this place in Guide A goes as follows (p. 220):

When arriving at the door of this sacred place in the east,  
There are rocky hills on either side of the entrance,  
Resembling white silk curtains stretched and between [them],  
To the right side, the sky is merely visible,  
There is a valley in the south that leads towards the north,  
Go there where there is a cliff resembling a hoisted flag.  
There is a cave facing south.  
Light the torch and go inside,

There stand the Buddha Maitreya and the Eight Bodhisattvas.

It is interesting to see how the location of a pilgrimage place is outlined in the text above. The directions do not just point to geographical signs such as rocky hills and valleys, but they are accompanied with metaphors like rocky hills that look like white silk curtains and cliffs like hoisted flags. Together with the description of the physical landmarks and their metaphors, the text provides a fascinating descriptive map. After the physical descriptions, it explains the sacred objects, interpreted spiritually.

#### **1.4.2 Comments about the Author**

Little is known about the background of the author Cheeji Drakba. No text sources have been found. When asking present-day elder lamas and local intellectuals, familiar with the content of Guide A, they can hardly provide any information about the author. One informant gave me the valuable suggestion that the author was some Kagyulba lama, and it had been said that his biography was carved in wooden prints somewhere in Central Tibet, though no evidence on this biography has been discovered. The title of his name shows that the author was clearly neither from Amdo nor a tantric practitioner from adjacent regions of the mountain.

In order to draw some possible conclusions about the author, I will give a brief religious background of Amdo, a cultural province of Tibet of which Drakar Drel dzong is a part, and the Tibetan Buddhist schools spread around the mountain.

Amdo is a stronghold of the Geluk school (Gruschke 2001:12). The mountain has been dominated by the Gelukba since the establishment of the Drel dzong Monastery in 1923. Before the Geluk school gained a foothold, there were not many schools in this area; probably mainly the Nyingmabas, Kagyulba and adherents of the eclectic movement. There is evidence that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the local people were converted to the Geluk school. This period corresponds well with the rising power of the school during the regency of Sangjee Gyatso (Sang rgyas rGya mtsho, 1653-1705). However, the conversion did not seem to be undertaken from Drakar Drel dzong, and the historical events in this period at this site are unclear and can merely be inferred from Guide A. In reading Guide A, it appears that when it was written, the site was not connected to a particular school. This might be one of the reasons why there is no background information

about Guide A and its author in the text.

I assume that the author Cheeji Drakba was a yogin of the Kagyul school, particularly Drigung Kagyul. To analyse the different versions of his titles, Drigung ('Bri gung) and Heyon (dBu smyon), his title also appears as Tsangnyon (gTsang smyon). The 'Drigung' in the author's title shows that he has some connection with the Drigung lineage. Heyon literally means 'Crazy Drinker', but tantric practitioners are properly translated as 'Saintly Madman', a typical title used by Tibetan yogins themselves. And Tsangnyon means 'Madman from Tsang' and parallels the title of Tsangnyong Heruka (1452-1507), a celebrated Tibetan yogin, who is best known for his compiled works of *rnam thar* and *mgur 'bum* of Milarepa. Tsangnyong is also recognised as a 'school' and the tremendous literary achievement, lead by him and his disciples, has had a remarkable influence all over Tibet<sup>34</sup>. The author of Guide A, Cheeji Drakba, has these connections of being a yogin and Drigungba follower, probably of the Tsangnyon school.

Additionally, the author mentions two religious figures important to the Kagyul school, as mentioned above, and his excessive descriptions of the site in connection with tantric Buddhism demonstrate his close ties with Kagyulba tradition, as they initially had no monastic communities like today. Their religious teachings were spread among hermits and local adherents in remote mountainous regions and the followers of this tradition spent most of their lives with tantric practice and meditation. They had a strong tradition and long history of making pilgrimages, so their doctrines spread far and wide. Such a religious campaign was not only popular on the well-known holy mountains like Tsari, Labshi and Tise, but also widely spread in the inland of Tibet, like Amdo. The background of the author and Guide A indicates the presence of the school and other old schools more than at least three hundred years ago. They provide the long history of the Drakar Drel dzong Mountain that still has to be discovered.

### **1.5 Connection between the Historical Document Guide A and the Present Drakar Drel dzong Mountain**

Despite the obscure background of the author, Guide A has greatly influenced pilgrims' behaviour through the ages. It has become one of the historical sources that are cited in numerous books that are related to the mountain. Guide A circulated among a number of

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<sup>34</sup> See Huber (2003:256-258).

great holy men who visited the mountain for pilgrimage and retreat. As mentioned earlier, a prominent Tibetan *yogin* like Shabkar composed several religious songs to the mountain during his solitary retreat on the mountain. His songs reflect the content of Guide A, especially about the advent of Padmasambhava to the place and the empowerment of the landscape.

In the twentieth century, Lama Arol visited nomads around the mountain. Later in 1923, he established the Gelukba monastery Drel dzong. Lama Arol became a celebrated Tibetan scholar and influential religious master in Amdo. At some point, his praising songs and poems of the place were also based on the contents of Guide A.

The text of Guide A is now passed down less frequently; new guide books are written, and even modern video guides are produced by monks from the Drel dzong Monastery and young intellectuals, with the cooperation of elder lamas. It is interesting to compare these new guides with Guide A and how they represent the present-day holy mountain. We will discuss these issues in the next chapter.

## **Chapter Two: New Pilgrimage Guides to Drakar Drel dzong**

### **2.1 New Pilgrimage Guides**

This chapter describes how Tibetan lay intellectuals and monks are currently presenting a specific pilgrimage site, that of Drakar Drel dzong. I will discuss this subject by introducing recently written pilgrimage guides for Drakar Drel dzong Mountain, and later on, in the fourth section of this chapter, I will compare these with the old Guide A, composed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. These guides are instructions for pilgrims to specific pilgrimage sites on this mountain and have been written or published in recent years (mainly in 2004). I apply the word ‘recent’ to differentiate them from the earlier pilgrimage guide (i.e. Guide A). Although being labelled ‘new’ pilgrimage guides, they are, in fact, a continuation of early pilgrimage guides to the holy place, written by religious scholars during their pilgrimage to or their retreat at these sacred sites. It is nevertheless interesting to compare the old and new guides’ different ways of representing Drakar Drel dzong.

Until now recent pilgrimage guides describing holy sites in Amdo have not been studied that much. A few scholars have briefly discussed the present function of some such new pilgrimage guides (Buffetrille 2003), but the new guides to Drakar Drel dzong have not been studied yet. These new guides to Drakar Drel dzong are not only books, but also include a video guide with songs and music.

### **2.2 Introduction to the New Guides of Drakar Drel dzong**

In 2004, monks from Drel dzong Monastery and local Tibetan intellectuals composed several pilgrimage guides on the occasion of the Year of the Monkey, which is the year of the great pilgrimage to Drakar Drel dzong Mountain. Two guide books (Guides B and C) and one video guide (Guide D) to the mountain will be studied in this chapter.

Guide B is entitled ‘A Brief Guide Book to the Sacred Place of Drakar Drel dzong in Domel called the Nectar for the Ears of Pious Devotees’ (*Yul mdo smad kyi gnas mchog brag dkar spral rdzong gi gnas bshad rags bsdus dad ldan rna ba’i bdud rtsi zhes bya ba bzhugs so*) and also bears a Chinese subtitle, ‘Brief Introduction to the Sacred Place Drel dzong in Amdo’ (*An duo sheng di zhai zong gai shuo*). This 127-page guide was written by the two lay



intellectuals Samdrub Tsering and Banlhud, who had consulted with elder lamas from Drel dzong Monastery.

Guide C was written by a monastic committee from Drel dzong Monastery known as Drel dzong Gomba Dodam Lhankang (sPrel rdzong dGon pa Do tam Lhan khang). The title of this guide book is ‘Pilgrimage Guide to Drakar Drel dzong, One of the Four Greatest Sites in Domel’ (*mDo smad rdzong bzhi ’i ya gyal brag dkar sprel rdzong gi gnas mjal lam yig*). It is a 53-page modern printed book, and published in 2004. It states that the guide is written as a handbook for ordinary pilgrims visiting the mountain (see Figure 5).

Guide D is a video guide with the cover title ‘The Magnificent Drel dzong’ (*Spel rdzong gi gzi ’od*). Released in 2004, it was directed by Arol Lobzang Gelek Zangwo (born in 1977), the fourth reincarnation. Lay popular singers perform songs associated with the holy mountain and monastery in the video. This video guide also appeared in relation to the great pilgrimage to Drel dzong in the Year of the Wood Monkey (see Figures 6.1 and 6.2).

Part One: Pilgrimage Guides



From top to bottom: Figure 5, Figure 6.1, 6.2.

### 2.3 The Background of the Lay Intellectuals and Monks

In the last few decades a growing number of papers on local customs and sacred places in Amdo have been published by local scholars. Most of these scholars are educated lay people strongly influenced by modernity<sup>35</sup>. In old Tibet the laity had limited opportunity to study, since monastic education was predominant in their society and monasteries provided almost the only option for receiving an education. However, literacy and modern education have given the laity a chance to study their own culture<sup>36</sup>. An increase in national consciousness in the post-Cultural Revolution China triggered publication of a number of studies about local places and customs.

A good example is the newly written guide (i.e. Guide B) of Drakar Drel dzong initiated by lay intellectuals. In my opinion, their involvement in writing these new guides is related to their national consciousness. Earlier, such literature was often composed by religious practitioners like lamas and disciples. They were the ‘traditional’ experts in writing pilgrimage guides. Lay intellectuals usually did not participate in the composition of such texts and their contemporary active participation in composing such religious literature shows their dissatisfaction with the pre-modern guides, since these are not fully functional to the contemporary pilgrimage practices.

The newly written guides were also significantly influenced by monks at Drel dzong Monastery. Since their monastery is located at the foot of the mountain, monks have a strong sense of being part of the community in this sacred site. According to the monks, the holy mountain is part of their monastic domain ever since the third reincarnation of Lama Arol founded Drel dzong Monastery in 1923. Prior to the establishment of the monastery at Drakar Drel dzong Mountain, the area originally belonged to three nomadic kin groups: Chuzang, Drel tang and Ngadung. Today the area is divided into 18 villages within the administrative district. In 1921 Lama Arol, travelling in these nomadic areas around Drakar Drel dzong to give them religious empowerment, proposed to a local chief named Amchok (A mchog) that a Gelukba monastery should be built at the foot of the mountain. In 1923, Drel dzong Monastery was established here, thanks to donations from these nomadic kin groups. The enrolment of the monks in the monastery was from these kin groups. Later the kin groups

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<sup>35</sup> See such examples from Huber (2002).

<sup>36</sup> For a typical example of such literature, see Lhachok Gyal (2002) in the bibliography.

became known as Lhade, meaning ‘villages of gods’, since they are responsible for offering donations to the monastery and since most of the monks come from them.

It has been said that Lama Arol tamed a number of mountain gods (*yul lha, gzhi bdag*) in the area that once contested the building of the monastery. His religious achievement in establishing the monastery, taming the local gods and writing his works about the site, has increased the pride of the present monks. And in a way his achievements dominate the holy mountain with their charismatic authority.

## **2.4 Comparative Study of the New Guides with Guide A**

First, I shall make a comparative study of the content of the new guides (Guides B, C and D) and Guide A. Guide B, written by laymen, attempts to present the site based on historical and contemporary sources. This new guide emphasises numerous old materials about the holiness of the mountain, written by earlier Tibetan lamas. In Guide B one finds plenty of references and quotes about the holy mountain from earlier texts, written by the well-known yogin Shabkar and lamas like Arol (p. 65-89). It is unlikely that pilgrims have read all these texts, since the main goal of their pilgrimage is to visit specific pilgrimage places. Nevertheless, these older texts have been extensively included in the new guide to glorify the holiness of the site as a historical place which has been substantiated by the words of great lamas. The modern parts of Guide B include the introduction and the detailed descriptions of the pilgrimage places of Drakar Drelzong written by the authors themselves. These sections provide much new information which will be discussed later in detail. Guide C focuses on the description of the pilgrimage routes, particularly emphasising a creative presentation. Guide D includes a variety of modern elements such as songs and music.

### *Comparative Study between Guide A and B*

First of all, I will look at the differences in the preliminary sections of Guide A and Guide B. As being part of Tibetan traditional literature, pilgrimage guides usually start with a prophetic description. A master’s empowerment is important to and typical of Tibetan pilgrimage literature. Since a well-known religious figure legitimates the holiness of a site, his role is frequently described in the preliminary section (Buffetrille 1998, Huber 1997).

Guide A, as I discussed in Chapter One, emphasises the role of the mythical-historical religious figure Padmasambhava. In its preliminary section it describes the ‘conversion’

process of local gods and demons, and the consecration of the landscape. The description is not found in Guide B, instead it briefly stresses the arrival of the third reincarnation of Lama Arol by employing the prophecy of Avalokiteśvara's advent to Tibet, found in the collection of oral transmission compiled in *bKa' gdams glegs bam*.<sup>37</sup> Guide B connects Avalokiteśvara to Lama Arol. The text says that Lama Arol is the embodiment of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara and several lines follow to demonstrate his significant role as a tamer of the local landscape and the supernatural beings believed to reside in it. Lama Arol is seen as a protector of all beings because he brought both conventional teachings of the Mahāyāna sutras as well as esoteric tantric doctrines to the area.

This change in religion, i.e. the taming of local spiritual beings, has served to strengthen the fame of Lama Arol and his monastery located at the foot of the holy mountain. The text also introduces his role in the area, and gives an introduction to the monastery from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present time.

Lay intellectuals mainly attempt to present the significance of the site within the cultural territory of Amdo in Tibet. Instead of including the administrative division of Drakar Drel dzong, Guide B introduces the location by merely portraying the place as one of the four great sacred mountains in Domel, and the advent of Tsongkhapa to the mountain. There is a detailed description of his sojourn at the mountain, known as 'the Auspicious Mountain Pass' (*bKra shis la yi gnas*) (p. 26). Most Amdo people consider him, whose birth place is in the region, as 'the second Buddha' (*rJe rgyal ba gnyis pa*). The authors use the cultural connotations of the site and the important religious figures who have stayed at or visited the place to glorify its religious history and significance.

It is interesting to see how the authors of the two guides portray the holy mountain. The earlier Guide A, a typical traditional pilgrimage description, narrates the spiritual and magic interpretations of the site, while in the latter, Guide B, the quasihistorical and territorial identifications of the site are stressed. This is one of the examples of how lay intellectuals introduce their perspectives and understandings of the site.

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<sup>37</sup> *bKa' gdams glegs bam* is a text collection of the Kadamba (*bKa' gdams pa*) school, which traces its origins from the teachings of the Indian master Atiśa (982-1054) and his principal student Dromtonba ('Brom ston pa, 1004-1064), the Tibetan founder of the lineage. It is presumed that the collections are oral transmissions of Atiśa and Dromtonba, which the Gelukbas consider to be a significant part of their tradition. For further discussion on this text, see Eimer (1978); for another very informative reference about this text, with English translation, see Thupten (2008).

Guides A and B differ also in the pilgrimage route descriptions. Consciously and/or unconsciously, the authors of Guide B have omitted some traditional pilgrimage places while new ones are introduced. An interesting dissimilarity is their different focus on Buddhist orientations found in the descriptions of the pilgrimage routes. Both guides draw on different levels of Buddhist orientations: normative and popular practice. Normative Buddhism refers to the idealised Buddhism that concentrates on enlightenment, while popular practice refers to religious practices among laymen (Obeyesekere 1963, Lopez 1997, Samuel 1993). These terms can be applied to the pilgrimage route descriptions in Guides A and B. Guide A, as we discussed in Chapter One, focuses on tantric practices of *maṇḍala* that are assumed to be naturally formed on the pilgrimage places. Since the main goal of meditation and tantric practices is to reach spiritual realisation or enlightenment, the association of pilgrimage places with such ideas can be considered as normative orientation.

However, in Guide B one finds a great number of popular practices dealing with the accumulation of wealth and good luck and descriptions of cultural relics. These popular and traditional practices were narrated in oral form. For example, in the pilgrimage stories, one is about King Gesar, the legendary hero who united Tibet and saved his people from evil forces. Tibetan nomads in the north-eastern part of Tibet, where the nomadic areas of Drakar Drel dzong are situated, believe that the Epic of King Gesar has its origin in their Heroic Age (Hermanns 1965). In many nomadic areas, one can find in the mountains numerous ‘naturally formed signs’ of King Gesar. Guide B describes places where pilgrims can visit the footprints of Gesar’s horse and dog (p. 34) and the arrows of Gyatsa (rGya tsha), another character in the Epic (p. 28). One place is called ‘the Purple Meat’ (Sha sgyo smug ris); the text says that this was the meat storage (p. 29) of Aku<sup>38</sup> Trotung (A khu Khro thung), another main character in the Epic of Gesar. It is believed that touching the stones and making offerings there expels bewitched spells and helps to obtain prosperity and enjoyment. These pilgrimage places are said to be located on the circumambulation path which all pilgrims must follow. In addition, Guide B frequently describes locations and various forms of the mountain god at Drakar Drel dzong.

This added information in Guide B is not new but a preservation of the existing oral tradition, indicating lay intellectuals’ consciousness in preserving their local culture in written form. Since books are considered sacred in Tibet, pilgrims’ behaviour and attitudes are derived

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<sup>38</sup>Aku (*a khu*) is a respectful title of elder males; it is generally translated into English as ‘uncle’.

from written texts (Buffetrille 2003), and the written form can thus rescue oral traditions from being forgotten. Pilgrims depend on the book for information about the sites even if they have not read it themselves, as such information can be transmitted through other pilgrims who have read the guide.

Guide A has an elite attitude in describing pilgrimage practices and informing participants about the practice. It confirms status hierarchy between people, which is also a common feature of other traditional pilgrimage guides (i.e. Newman 1996). Like a number of other guides, Guide A puts emphasis on the superior and inferior cognitive ability to visit certain pilgrimage places on the basis of a pilgrim's *karmic* and spiritual status. Guide B puts less stress on such hierarchical levels of pilgrim's *karmic* and spiritual status, but rather provides detailed descriptions of specific places in an open and straightforward mode.

I argue that Guide B is strongly influenced by the background of the lay intellectuals who wrote it. They wrote the guide so that it would be appropriate for ordinary pilgrims who are mainly interested in the popular religious practices focused on e.g. merit making. This is a great difference in the writings between the Buddhist elites and modern Tibetan intellectuals. For the former often confirm the hierarchical spiritual levels of people, while the latter attempt to assimilate the popular practices into the guide describing the places ordinary pilgrims actually visit. The lay authors' modern education has given them their own style of presentation, and they are not totally dependent on what is written in earlier guides. They abandon the mythical lore about Padmasambhava's arrival as described in Guide A, but provide more concrete and historical events as well as practical information that are significant to the site. Do such changes also influence the contemporary monks' perspective? In order to find some possible answers, Guides A and C are compared in the next part.

#### *Comparative Study between Guides A and C*

A remarkable difference in Guide C compared with Guide A is the description of the pilgrimage route. Guide C reorganises the illustrations of the places in its own style. This includes categorising the pilgrimage places into groups, and Chinese translations are given. Guide C bears the title of pilgrimage guide (*lam yig*), but it can be counted as a modern tourist guide as well. The guide book is written as a handy modern handbook with pictures showing the places described

The pilgrimage route descriptions in this guide are reorganised in comparison with Guide A. Guide C has divided the 18 pilgrimage routes into three groups. Each category consists of a certain number of places:

- a. ‘The Eight Great Pilgrimage Places’ (gNas sgo che brgyad)
- b. ‘The Six Medium Places’ (gNas sgo ‘bring drug)
- c. ‘The Four Small Places’ (gNas sgo chung bzhi)

In the descriptions of each category, the specific places are mentioned. The hierarchical classification of the places into great, medium and small is based on Buddhist ideas of sacredness. This categorisation is closely similar to the terminology for Buddhist orientations used by Melford E., Spiro (1982:1) *nibbanic*, which mainly concerns the pursuit of enlightenment; 2) *kammatic*, characterised by the doctrines of *karma*, merit and rebirth, and 3) *apotropaic*, concerning worldly affairs and magical protections. The Eight Great Pilgrimage Places are related to *nibbanic* orientation, while the other two, the Six Medium and the Four Small Places, are oriented towards *kammatic* concerns of merit and rebirth and *apotropaic*, this-worldly affairs.

The categorisation was made by the authors of Guide C to demonstrate the difference in significance of the places according to Buddhist values. The first category known as the Eight Great Pilgrimage Places mostly pertains to sacred places at Drakar Drelzong concerning normative practice such as the pursuit of enlightenment through meditation on Buddhist deities and their *maṇḍala* palaces. Such symbols are found in caves where religious masters have meditated throughout history, and in this way the great masters of the past have re-sacralised the site. The Six Medium Pilgrimage Places and Four Small Places are related to the elimination of bad *karma*, defilement and accumulating fortunes and wealth.

The pilgrimage route descriptions, associated with other-worldly affairs like meditation and spiritual realisation, are categorised in the largest and most significant group – the Eight Great Pilgrimage Places. Meanwhile, the other two groups have fewer places and are more focused on this-worldly affairs such as wealth, fortune and healing of diseases. Such categorisation is not found in Guide A. The descriptions of the pilgrimage places in Guide C do not follow the typical traditional Tibetan pilgrimage guides in which pilgrimage routes are usually described in a clockwise direction from one place to another. In Guide C, most of the



places within one group are situated at different locations on the mountain, and not clockwise related.

The categorisation into major and minor places according to a spiritual hierarchy is a great help for the pilgrims in recognising the importance of the places when planning their pilgrimage. For most pilgrims however, a well-planned pilgrimage is to enter at a particular point and keep moving in an orderly fashion (clockwise) to other locations and exit at a particular point. The intellectually designed categories do not take into account the practical need for a well-planned pilgrimage for the pilgrims. When performing a pilgrimage, using Guide A will help pilgrims to manage in an orderly way. Since Guide A follows the standard spatial layout of most Tibetan pilgrimage guides, devotees to Drakar Dreldzong will follow the route described in Guide A, even though the guide is not available to them. This also shows that the pilgrims have acquired the main content of Guide A orally. Guide C will help them just as a practical ‘tourist guide’ during their visit to the site, since it is not a typical pilgrimage guide description. But it can help pilgrims learn more about the Buddhist context of the places they visit.

The categorisation into major, middle and minor sacred places reflects the authors’ competence as learned Buddhist monks and their ability to categorise the pilgrimage places according to a hierarchy of Buddhist values. My question concerns whether these categories can also be found in traditional Tibetan scholastic and folk literature. Categorisation words such as ‘major’ and ‘minor’<sup>39</sup>, ‘upper’, ‘middle’ and ‘lower’<sup>40</sup>, and ‘great’, ‘middle’ and ‘small’, accompanied with respective numbers, are used extensively in the Tibetan literary tradition. Such categories also dominate in Tibetan folklore such as folk songs and riddles (Tucci 1966, Ramble 2002, Hein 2007). The methods of classification are probably made for memorisation, but they also imply notions of a hierarchical status.

The other prominent distinction between Guides A and C is related to the different aims of the respective textual presentations. The main aims of Guide A appear to be to introduce how the mountain became holy and what sacred objects are naturally formed in the landscape. It is

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<sup>39</sup> For instance, this can be compared with Tibetan traditional categories of the so-called ‘cultural sciences’ (*rig gnas*) (Cabezón and Jackson 1996:17-32). The traditional categories of the subjects are called ten cultural sciences: ‘the Five Major Cultural Sciences’ (*rig gnas che ba lagna*) and ‘the Five Minor Cultural Sciences’ (*rig gnas chung ba lagna*).

<sup>40</sup> The ethnographic Tibet is categorised in ‘three provinces’ (*chol kha gsum*), which further divide into ‘the three Upper Tod’ (*sTod mgna’ ris skor sgum*) referring to west part of Tibet, ‘the Four Middle U Tsang Districts’ (*Bar dbus gtsang ri bzhi*), referring to Central and Tsang part of Tibet, and ‘the Six Lower Do Mountains’ (*sMad mdo smad sgong drug*) referring to Amdo and Kham areas.

possible to refer to these aims as a method of Buddhicisation<sup>41</sup>. Although there are no traces of Drakar Drel dzong being a Bonpo mountain, the same term (Buddhicisation or perhaps ‘Bonicisation’) can be used to describe transformations of a physical landscape into a Bon cosmology. Guide A focuses on the ‘process of Buddhicisation’ (Buffetrille 1998:21). This process – in Toni Huber’s term the ‘conversion process’ – was initiated by the great lama Padmasambhava taming the local gods, consecrating the landscape and legitimating access of the site to Buddhist followers. In addition, it describes numerous spiritual realms that are supposed to be naturally formed on the mountain. The description is useful for tantric practitioners and other readers who may find interests in the text, but it has a limited value for general readers.

The main objective of Guide C appears to be to make the site known to a wider public. Unlike Guide A, which is mainly aimed at the Buddhist elites, Guide C attempts to draw the attention of ordinary pilgrims as well as others (possibly tourists) who may find the site interesting. Such aspects are evident from the text. Guide C omits narratives of the conversion inaugurated by Padmasambhava since they have little significance to the contemporary public from all social backgrounds, including both religious and secular readers. We can illustrate this with some examples from the text.

One feature of Guide C is that it is written in a modern Tibetan language, because today the majority of pilgrims are local Tibetans from remote villages. This is one of the reasons why the language of the new guides has been written in a modern style, accessible for lay pilgrims. But it can also be read by a general public with moderate knowledge of the mountain and Buddhist terminology that are used frequently in Guide A. Regardless of the fact that monks are in general well versed in the classical Tibetan language and highly educated in religious terminology, the modified information given in Guide C reflects a new strategy of the monks to introduce the site to a greater number of pilgrims.

The text actively describes the landscape and scenery of the site in a special way. As mentioned above, each pilgrimage place is accompanied with a picture, so the reader is given a combination of a spiritual and a physical description of the pilgrimage places. On one hand, all pilgrimage places are introduced in a religious and spiritual context. On the other hand, the places are described as natural landscapes, and the wildlife living near the pilgrimage

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<sup>41</sup> I use the term following the idea of Snellgrove (e.g.1987), taken up by Per Kværne (e.g.1995) on Bon religion and its association with Buddhism.

places is described. For instance, ‘the Sacred Place of the Great Gathering’ (Yang rdzong ’du mo’i gnas), one of the Eight Great Pilgrimage Places (p. 20), is described as follows: ‘In this pilgrimage place one finds hundreds of wild goats and other species’ (p. 21).

Even though Drakar Drel dzong was not opened as a tourist site before 2004, Guide C wants to convince tourists to observe the landscape and the religious values of the natural scenery of the place. With this guide book, tourists can visit the places without following the normative order fashioned by Buddhist monks. They can neglect the norms that devotional pilgrims would obey, such as following the right spatial order of the route, written in the traditional pilgrimage guide. For pilgrims, the alternative route visiting the places must follow the collective social expectations of the clockwise direction and acknowledge the departure and exit points of the route. In Guide C, the order of the places to visit on the routes is presented as an individual choice. Tourists may choose the scenery depending on their own interest while reading the guide to learn more about the religious context of the places they visit. Though the guide book may not have been directly designed as a tourist guide, it provides good information for the modern tourists as well.

The Chinese translation at the end of the guide (p.38-53) is intended to attract a broad public, especially those who can read Chinese. Changing holy places into a tourist attraction might be another reason for a Chinese translation of the text. It offers an introduction to the sacred mountain and its 18 pilgrimage places. The use of two languages in this pilgrimage guide is the result of social changes in traditional Tibetan areas, and shows that the Chinese language is becoming more popular among local intellectuals. In the 1600s, when Guide A was composed, the Tibetan world was quite different from what it is today. In particular, due to the geographical position of Amdo, it is now one of the most multi-ethnic regions in China. Chinese is becoming a *lingua franca* among non-Tibetans (this applies to all minorities in China) and increasingly also for young urbanised and educated Tibetans. Thus, if one wants to have a bigger public for the guide, a Chinese translation is an inevitable option. Today monks also are aware of the increasing influence of the social mainstream of the Chinese majority. Numerous Chinese have settled in the local towns. New generations of monks, who are responsible for the external and administrative affairs of Drel dzong Monastery, need to learn Chinese in order to maintain their official relationship with non-Tibetan officials and visitors to the monastery and the holy mountain.

Making the pilgrimage site better known by writing new guides like Guide C reveals to us how Chinese, due to economic and administrative reasons, may in the future become the dominant language even in remote pilgrimage sites. This socio-cultural change requires the young generations to develop new strategies to sustain their Tibetan representation of pilgrimage at the holy mountain, one of the economic bases that help the monastic tradition to survive.

The Chinese translation is a result of a co-operation between monks and lay translators who are fluent in Chinese. The language cannot be learnt yet at the monastery, as monks do not study Chinese, but the translation is promoted by lay intellectuals who are capable of making such translations. It is striking to see the transforming perspectives of pilgrimage guide literature in monastic circles, in particular how they reconstruct the pilgrimage places for a larger public. This reflects the position of Tibetan Buddhists in the shaping of modern China (Tuttle 2005).

#### *Guide D (the Video Guide)*

Guide D represents a dramatic change of Tibetan pilgrimage guides. Its content includes a narrative describing the place, songs of praise to the locality accompanied by local traditional music played on the *dunglen (rdung len)*<sup>42</sup>, and a depiction of the surrounding landscape (see Figure 8). The narrative introduces Drakar Drel dzong and the pilgrimage routes. The songs of praise are sung by popular local singers. The songs eulogise the mountain, the monastery and the achievements of former lamas. These three components – narration, songs and scenery – are the major elements of the video guide. Such elements show how the use of a modern medium as video causes a development, differing in an important degree from the traditional way of describing a pilgrimage site.

The narration is told by a Tibetan television host from Ziling (Xining), the provincial capital. It mainly pays attention to the locality and the pilgrimage places at Drakar Drel dzong. The narrator introduces each pilgrimage place that appears on the screen. Their location along the circumambulation path is described. The narrative does not merely contain descriptions of pilgrimage places, but is accompanied with music and pictures of the site. A group of male pilgrims can be seen on the screen to demonstrate how pilgrims ought to behave at specific

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<sup>42</sup> This style of music was spread and became known in 1980s primarily through cassettes and mass media like radio, see Savolainen (2007).

pilgrimage places while the narrator describes each of the places along the circumambulation path.

Is this an evolution of the early pilgrimage guide (Guide A)? In comparing Guides A and D, one can notice that the pilgrimage sites are described significantly different. Guide A is mainly intended for tantric practitioners, who aspire towards higher levels of spiritual realisation and who are able to visualise the pilgrimage places as spiritual realms; Guide D, on the other hand, straightforwardly describes the routes open to pilgrims from all kinds of backgrounds, in addition to showing the actual physical pilgrimage places to the general public. Perhaps this dramatic change can be considered as a development from spiritual to physical, from internal to external experiences. Visitors can watch the places and listen to the narrations without any problems of superior and inferior cognitive levels that are highly emphasised in Guide A. In addition, the level of literacy does not limit the accessibility of the information given.

Guide D reflects a globalising trend among young Tibetans comparable with trends among young generations in the rest of the world. The new generation of Tibetans also follows the ideas from non-Tibetan Western young generations about ‘fashion’ (*gsar tar*) and the ideas of ‘creativity’ (*gser btod*). Modern forms of communication such as videos (VCD and DVD) are increasingly popular in Amdo. Young people watch movies produced in China and abroad. Particularly educated young Tibetans use internet cafes in local towns to surf the internet, web-chat and enjoy their personal blogs. Video is also becoming a local product along with a booming trend of Tibetan popular songs in urban and traditional music, where *dunglen* is played by laymen in nomadic and farming areas. Two such popular players, Dulbe (bDud bhe), a local *dunglen* player, and Lugi Gyal (Lu gu rgyal), a folk song singer, sometimes perform the music from the video guide.

Guide D is an example of a modern trend made by young Tibetan people. The lyrics are purely religious and the songs are accompanied with local, traditional music. This type of music is frequently considered a medium of entertainment and celebration among lay people. The lyrics are composed by lay intellectuals, local singers themselves, and Arol Rinboche. The lyrics of the songs mostly deal with:

- 1) Praising the holiness of Drakar Drel dzong

2) Religious figures (e.g. the third reincarnation of Arol Rinboche)

3) Pilgrimage routes

4) Nostalgia songs for the site

Changing a pilgrimage guide into such a video form reflects an actual and active advertisement of the site. Guide D is also more economically orientated than a purely religious pursuit. Copies of the video are available for sale in the local market. The actors who released the video are applying new ways to introduce the site to the so-called ‘outside’ world, using ideas about fashion and popularity. One example of how such a DVD guide can be considered as an advertisement is that the narrator is a professional TV host, and the music performances are done by local popular singers, well known as *dunglen* players and folk song singers. Especially Dulbe and Lugi Gyal have many fans among the local Amdowas. In addition the beautiful sceneries, added to the professional presentations on the screen, can help to attract a large number of people (mostly young) to the site.

## **Chapter Conclusion**

In comparison with Guide A, there is clearly a dramatic change in the pilgrimage guides of this site in contemporary times. The text of Guide A mainly represents high Buddhist perceptions that in some ways can hardly be used in lay practices, since ordinary pilgrims do not understand the references to Buddhist philosophy and esoteric religious practices. Lay intellectuals are aware of the shortcomings and advantages of the early guide. In order to present a more satisfactory text that covers both religious and cultural phenomena of the site, they wrote a new guide (i.e. Guide C). Most of the material they included in the new guides is quoted from the early pilgrimage guide (Guide A). The lay intellectuals also introduced their own descriptions of the site. In these new guides we can see two kinds of actors: lay intellectuals and monks. Most of them belong to the younger generation, especially Lama Arol, and the singers. Both actors hold different objectives. Lay intellectuals aim to raise national consciousness by introducing the site from their perspectives, while monks are more inclined to develop new strategies to attract a wider general public, including tourists if possible. The new pilgrimage guides are written according to modern pilgrimage

practices. And as a result of increasing social changes, in particular among the younger generations, there is a trend to promote the site in a modern, fashionable way.

All in all, whatever the reasons for changing the traditional pilgrimage guides into modern styled guides, it is clear that the authors or actors are motivated and determined to change the traditional style of the pilgrimage guide, and probably to adapt the present day pilgrimage practice to the modern world. The new guides reflect phenomena of modernisation whose dynamic interplay will bring further changes in the pilgrimage site Drakar Dredzong.

## **Chapter Three: Pilgrimage Practice at Drakar Drel dzong**

This chapter is based on participant observation on pilgrimage practice at Drakar Drel dzong during my visit there in the summer of 2007. The main object of this fieldwork has been to get a deeper understanding of the conceptions of this pilgrimage site as well as to observe what pilgrims actually say and do. I will briefly introduce general pilgrimage to the holy mountain and describe a pilgrimage I performed. I have been interested in questions like: Are there discrepancies between the precept (pilgrimage guides) and practice (the reality)? Do the pilgrims actually read the guide books to the site? If they cannot read, are they acquainted with the content? And if so, do they follow the instructions of the guides? How do pilgrimage and the site change in contemporary time? Furthermore, I wanted to find out whether there were other conceptions of the mountain that are not contained in the guide books.

### **3.1 Pilgrimage to Drakar Drel dzong**

With few exceptions, the majority of pilgrims to Drakar Drel dzong are nomads from remote areas belonging to various populations, and they come from the large territory of the north-eastern part of Amdo: Badzong, Mangra, Chika, Rebgong and Labrang in the east, and Chabcha (Chab cha) and areas around Kokonor Lake in the north. Pilgrims also come from the whole of Xinghai County, which Drel dzong is part of. Individuals from all kinds of social backgrounds participate in the pilgrimage, both men and women and young and old. Pilgrimages to the site are made not only to show a pilgrim's faith, but they have also become a part of the cultural pattern of the nomadic inhabitants in the region.

The largest number of pilgrims occurs during the event of the Great Pilgrimage. Every twelfth year, during the Year of the Monkey, a special pilgrimage to Drel dzong is celebrated and many ordinary pilgrims come to visit the mountain. It is believed that a high number of pilgrims come during this year because of the extra merit earned during this particularly auspicious year. Usually, pilgrims from distant places come as organised groups of families, relatives and friends. These organised groups plan their schedule, transportation, food and other religious paraphernalia. The great pilgrimage of the Wood Monkey Year in 2004 was the second time since the Cultural Revolution that the pilgrimage was practiced. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in China, pilgrimages and other religious manifestations



were forbidden. The Great Pilgrimage of the Year of the Monkey in 1992 was the first in decades.

The pilgrimage involves the practice of ‘circumambulation’ (*skor ba*) around the mountain. Pilgrims usually walk around the mountain by following the ‘circumambulation path’ (*skor lam*). According to monks at Drel dzong Monastery, there are three circles of circumambulation. The first is known as ‘the outer circle’ (*phyi skor*), which includes the four cardinal directions with four lakes and the four corners of the cardinal directions with four powerful mountain gods. The four lakes and mountain gods that they refer to do not exist in the common sense, but are perhaps an interpretation of the religious geography from the former tantric lama, Cheeji Drakba, the author of Guide A. The second, approximately 27-mile long circle is called the ‘middle circle’ (*bar skor*), while the 12-mile long ‘inner circle’ (*nang skor*) is the present day circumambulation path (see Figure 7). Most pilgrims walk along the inner circle of the circumambulation path, which is a full round that crosses the middle part of Drakar Drel dzong Mountain. Some pilgrims also visit the pilgrimage places located in the upper part of the mountain.

A pilgrim’s number of circumambulations is vital to the pilgrimage. It is believed that the more times one performs a circumambulation, the better the blessings one can receive. Ideally, a pilgrim walks at least seven times around the mountain. This is probably connected to the Buddhist idea of the auspicious number seven that at some point represents both life and death. In the nomadic areas of Amdo, a newborn baby is kept inside the home away from the gaze of outsiders for seven days; when someone dies, he or she is mourned for seven days, and after seven weeks the person is believed to be reborn. However, the choice of circumambulation depends on the pilgrims, and not all pilgrims perform the circumambulation seven times. Once the pilgrimage starts, pilgrims are committed to complete the journey.

Most pilgrims complete one circumambulation within four to five hours on foot, but if they make prostrations as they go, it takes them the whole day. According to a female pilgrim I spoke with, her experience was that it took 48 hours to visit all the pilgrimage places on foot, including the upper and lower parts of the mountain, and for my part it took me nearly a day to accomplish one circumambulation on foot.

Not all pilgrims are dressed in their traditional long Amdo robes<sup>43</sup>, wearing hats made of fox fur or sheepskin and handmade leather boots as they used to. Today, it is common to see pilgrims with Western coats and suits, particularly young pilgrims with cell phones and cameras in their hands. Meanwhile, most men as well as some women wear amulet boxes on their chests, containing a small statue of Buddha or a great lama or a piece of paper with sacred writings on it.

The practice of pilgrimage is combined with *mantra* recitations, prostrations (*phyag 'tshal*) and offerings (*mchod*). Some pilgrims commonly hold spinning prayer wheels while chanting the *mantra* and counting rosary beads. They also make full-length prostrations along the circumambulation path. This practice connects the practitioner with the empowered landscape. Offering is also a common ritual performed during the pilgrimage. In order to show their respect, pilgrims usually place 'silk scarves' (*kha btags*) in front of the altars where saints or lamas have previously stayed. Pilgrims apply yak butter and coins to naturally formed footprints and sacred objects on the rocks.

### *Pilgrimage Routes*

At present, access to the pilgrimage route to Drakar Drel dzong is gained through one of two entrances. The choice depends on the pilgrims' original point of departure. One must remember to circumambulate in the proper Buddhist (clockwise) direction:

In the east: 'the Big Pilgrimage Entrance' (gNas sgo chen po)<sup>44</sup>, located east of the mountain, is a small valley at Drakar Drel dzong. In the past, all pilgrims started their circumambulation at this place, and even today some pilgrims choose to set off their journey at this place.

In the south: Drel dzong Monastery, from where one can reach the mountain. A public road is open from the local town of Xinghai to Drel dzong Monastery. Since the establishment of the monastery a majority of pilgrims take this route to start their circumambulation. I will discuss the change of the routes in the next passages.

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<sup>43</sup> The Tibetan robe (*phyu pa*) is basically made of thick wool, overlapping at the front from left to right, and belted tightly at the waist with a sash or belt.

<sup>44</sup> In this chapter I have translated the names of specific pilgrimage places into English, following their Tibetan transliterations, in order to give an idea of their meaning.

### **3.2 Pilgrimage in 2007**

The number of pilgrims markedly declines after the momentous event of the Great Pilgrimage that takes place every twelfth year. Although there are no official statistics about the exact number of pilgrims to the mountain annually and at special occasions (like the Great Pilgrimage), monks from Drel dzong Monastery informed me that there are annually about 5 to 6 thousand pilgrims from outside the Drakar Drel dzong area. and during the Great Pilgrimage approximately 1.5 to 1.6 million pilgrims come to visit the mountain. We can see a huge increase in the number of pilgrims during such special occasions.

In summer 2007, I made a pilgrimage along with several local pilgrims, both male and female and of different ages and backgrounds. I was accompanied by a twelve-year-old monk from Drel dzong Monastery who had kindly offered to make the pilgrimage with me in order to show specific pilgrimage places. I also encountered several local pilgrims at Drakar Drel dzong: three nomad women, two older and one younger, from Labrang (Figure 23), and a group of ten men, women and children from Chika. Coincidentally, we became one team of pilgrims.

None of the pilgrims in this team carried any pilgrimage guides. Among the group of ten from Chika, there was a middle-aged lay man; both he and his family had made three pilgrimages to Drakar Drel dzong, and he could describe specific pilgrimage places along the route. I was informed by him that most of his knowledge about the site was acquired from former pilgrims, from local men with interests in pilgrimage and from his own visit to the site. Those pilgrims especially women and children, without much knowledge of specific pilgrimage places listen to the ones who made pilgrimages earlier and follow their instructions, a typical method of oral transmission in nomadic societies. Carrying their belongings in bags tied with rope on the back, the two older women from Labrang held small prayer wheels and rosary beads. This was their first pilgrimage to the site. We took the pilgrimage route from the Big Pilgrimage Entrance as our departure point.

\_\_\_ The Big Pilgrimage Entrance, as mentioned earlier, is located east of the mountain and is a small valley at Drakar Drel dzong. There is a big cave to the left side of the valley, and a white stupa was erected at its entrance. Inside the cave is believed to contain numerous

spontaneously formed sacred imprints and objects. Pilgrims prostrate in front of this cave and attempt to visit the naturally formed sacred imprints on the rocks (see Figure 10).

Next to the big cave there is another cave called ‘the Pure Crystal’ (Dag pa shel ri), inside of which are eight smooth stones with a size of five centimetres. These stones are believed to be eight crystal pillars of a divine palace that are capable of bestowing fortunes to the devotees. Pilgrims touch the stones to receive blessings.

Between the big cave of white stupa and the Pure Crystal are located four meditation caves. Four practitioners, including a ‘lay tantric practitioner’ (*sngag pa*) from Chika, an elderly nun and two anonymous meditators, were taking retreat in the caves when we arrived there. Further inside the valley, the fertile soil is covered with lush green grass. The upper part of this valley is said to have naturally formed halls of feast from *dākinī*s and former lamas’ meditation caves (see Figure 16). A small earthen house was located at this pilgrimage place, where a local man in his fifties or sixties said he worked there to guard the place. He said that he was appointed by the Lhade to protect the wildlife at this site (surely not from pilgrims, but from hunters). Drakar Drel dzong, indeed, is home to hundreds of wild goats and dozens of deer and monkeys. During my visit there, I saw hundreds of wild goats descending from the upper to the lower parts of the mountain in the afternoon (Figure 19). They are the target of outside hunters who make money from selling the animal skins and other important parts to local Han Chinese and Chinese Muslim businessmen.

Across the cave is a small rocky hill with prayer flags. This hill is said to be the dwelling of the mountain god Nyendrel Dawa Chenpo. There are remnants of worship to this mountain god, including *labtse* (*lab tse*), cairns at e.g. summits of mountain passes, where ancient rites of worship to ‘territorial gods’ (*yul lha*, *gzhi bdag*) are performed. At the foot of the hill is a physical cairn with a cluster of huge arrows and an earthen throne for fumigation rites (Figure 25). Later, I learnt that rituals at the *labtse* were practiced by the adjacent nomadic groups: Chuzang, Dreltang and Nadung. To the right side of the mountain god’s dwelling is a high steep rock where Nyendrel Dawa Chenpo is naturally formed in a monkey’s appearance (Figure 24). Pilgrims from remote areas such as Badzong, Mangra, Chika, Rebgong, Labrang, Chabcha and around Kokonor Lake do not worship Nyendrel Dawa Chenpo, since they worship the mountain gods of their native place.

Immediately before the next pilgrimage place, pilgrims can see another small female mountain known as Tsunmo Maryak Ma (bTsun mo dMar yag Ma, see Figure 26). It is located to the east, outside of Drakar Drel dzong Mountain, about ten kilometres away from the Big Pilgrimage Entrance. The mountain stands alone in the middle of the Drelthang (sPrel thang) Plain. The left side of the mountain is filled with grass and trees, while the other side is bare and covered with red earth. Its total appearance looks like a Tibetan nomad woman's head, whose hair is falling down on the right shoulder. This mountain is said to be Nyendrel Dawa Chenpo's consort. Pilgrims do not visit it, but it has been a female mountain god to the three nomadic kin groups. Guide A also described this female mountain god as a 'Mother' (*yum*) and Nyendrel Dawa Chenpo as 'Father' (*yab*), and together they are *dharma* protectors and guardians of the place (*bka' srung zhing skyong yab yum*) (Drakgon Konchok Tenba Rabjee 1982:221). Pilgrims do not prostrate or make offerings to this mountain god, but they enjoy visiting the spot from a distance.

\_\_\_\_ 'The Path to Vajra Cave' (rDo rje phug lam) is situated in a valley to the south and about one kilometre away from the Big Pilgrimage Entrance. The cave is recognised as Padmasambhava's meditation place, where he subdued the demon that blocked the cave during his meditation. This pilgrimage place is described in Guide A, which details the process of how he powerfully tamed the demon (Figure 11).

There is a giant rock in front of the cave and a chimney-like hole leading from the ceiling of the cave to above. These signs are said to substantiate the actual visit of Padmasambhava and his subjugation of the opposing forces. A painted image of Padmasambhava was placed on an altar in the middle of the cave with offerings and piles of silk scarves left by previous pilgrims. The rock close to the chimney is said to naturally manifest his disciple who served him as a cook at Drakar Drel dzong. A legend goes that Padmasambhava magically opened a chimney-like opening from the ceiling of the cave, and this opening helped the cook escape from the demon. Due to Padmasambhava's blessings, he was able to fly. The master attempted to let the cook escape first, but the cook thought he could fly and felt he was better than his master. Due to his arrogance, the blessing vanished and the cook has been glued to the rock ever since. Pilgrims prostrate in front of the cave, and go inside to offer silk scarves and visit the naturally formed images, especially Padmasambhava's throne, the chimney-like hole and the cook. The next pilgrimage place is 'the Auspicious Pass' (bKra shis la).

\_\_\_ The Auspicious Pass is located further south of the Path to Vajra Cave. It connects the holy mountain and another small mountain to the south. Pilgrims need to follow the circumambulation path for about fifteen minutes to reach the mountain pass. Along the path to the southern side are small pilgrimage places with different versions of stories. For instance, there is a rock known as Padmasambhava's stove, while some say it is a naturally formed arrow for Gyatsa, a character in the Epic of King Gesar Ling (mentioned in Chapter 2). Prayer flags are set across the top of the pass. After reaching the high mountain pass, both male and female pilgrims throw a 'wind-horse' (*rlung rta*) and call out 'victory to the gods' (*gi gi lha rgyal lo*), full of excitement. Having crossed the mountain pass you come to the south side of Drakar Drelzong. There are small caves along the path which are said to contain treasures and holy water blessed by Padmasambhava. Continuing walking further down to the foot of the mountain, one comes to Drelzong Monastery in the west.

After crossing the compound of the monastery, continuing to the west, we came to some interesting pilgrimage places.

\_\_\_ 'The Tārā Bestowing a Son' (sGrol ma'i bu spyin) is situated on the south-western side of the mountain; this pilgrimage place is about one kilometre from the monastery. This place is for beseeching fertility and the safe delivery of a child (Figure 12). There are piles of tsa-tsa (*tsha tsha*)<sup>45</sup> made by previous pilgrims and nearby villagers.

Two rivers flow from the west valley along the place of the Tārā Bestowing a Son to the east. These rivers are known as 'male river' (*pho chu*) and 'female river' (*mo chu*) (Figure 13). They are joined close to the Tārā Bestowing a Son. Female pilgrims drink the water, so they can have a safe delivery. Inside the river there is a stone that is said to have a naturally formed 'blue turquoise dragon' (*g.yu 'brug sngon mo*). Pilgrims flick the water into the sky so that the grass of their native land will be green and their livestock yaks and sheep will escape from drought and other natural disasters. None of these places are described in any of the guides discussed earlier.

\_\_\_ 'Repaying Parents' Kindness Site' (Pha ma'i drin lan 'jal sa) is positioned approximately ten steps to the west of the pilgrimage place of the Tārā Bestowing a Son. This place is not

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<sup>45</sup> Tsa-tsa is made from water and earth. It is clay impressions made with a metal mould containing the hollowed, reversed image of a deity or sacred symbol. The stamped images are dried in the sun and in some cases fired into hardness. For more information about *tsa tsa*, see Tucci 1980.

mentioned in the earlier guide, but is described in the recent ones. It is a stone erected nearby the rocky side of the mountain where its foot falls to the two rivers. A pilgrim told me that at this place, pilgrims should carry a smaller stone that is placed beside the erected stone, and circle it three times. Meanwhile, they should say, 'Now (you see) I repaid my parents' kindness, so (you know) I do not need to pay it again in the future' (*pha ma'i drin lan 'jal ni min nas, sang phyin chad 'jal rgyu med ni min nas*)<sup>46</sup>. However, none of the pilgrims in our team did this.

Next to this place is another pilgrimage place identified as 'Hammer of the Lord of the Dead' (gShin rje skam pa). It is two vertical stones about one and a half metres high. Pilgrims enter between these two stones to weigh their moral deeds. They say that pilgrims with good morals would pass it easily no matter his or her size, while those with bad morals would have difficulty coming through no matter how slim he or she was. After this place, the pilgrimage route turned to the northwest.

#### \_\_\_\_\_ 'Heavenly Pass' (mTho ris la)

Pilgrims need to make an arduous, ascending walk from the foot of the mountain to the top of a mountain pass named 'Heavenly Pass'. This ascending path is believed to have 49 steps. It is considered to be a ladder to the heavenly realm. Each step thus helps pilgrims to be freed from their suffering in this world. When reaching the top of this pass, pilgrims perform the same ritual as they had done at the other mountain pass, the Auspicious Pass. There were rows of prayer flags fluttering in the wind. Pilgrims scattered wind-horses in the open sky in different directions, calling: 'victory to the gods'.

Next to the mountain pass is the naturally formed Chenrezig, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, located at the peak.

We took a short break before continuing to the next pilgrimage place. The top of the mountain is so high that one almost feels one is standing in the clouds. In all directions one can also make a full view of the distant mountain ranges. Local nomads black tents (*sbra nag*) were put up at the foot of the mountains. Flocks of yaks and sheep spread through the fertile valleys of the nearby mountains (see Figure 20 and 21).

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<sup>46</sup> I transliterated all these words the pilgrims said during the worship of pilgrimage in the exact oral form.

Descending from the mountain pass to the northern side, one encounters several pilgrimage places along the circumambulation path in the lower part of the mountain. The pilgrimage places include King Gesar's dog and horse's footprints that were naturally formed on stones (Figure 15). Some silk scarves had been offered on the stones by some previous pilgrims. Next to that was another stone known as 'the Purple Meat Storage' (Sha sgyo smug ris). It was covered with butter and coins from previous pilgrims. Pilgrims also touch the stone with their hands, as it is believed that it brings wealth.

\_\_\_ 'Prostration Place of the Old Man from Arik' (A rig rgan po'i phyag 'tshal sa), is located around twenty steps away from the Purple Meat Storage towards the northeast. The place is solid, bare earth of one metre's length and width. The Old Man from Arik was said to be a crazy nomad from the Arik area which lived near Kokonor Lake. It is said that he spent his entire life by making pilgrimages to all the holy places in Tibet. Legend goes that the Old Man from Arik prostrated at this place to the naturally formed Chenrezig located at the peak of the mountain. The old man vowed to continue his prostration until the Bodhisattva told him to stop. After years of prostration, from which imprints of his knees and feet were formed on the ground, the Bodhisattva was touched by his pious devotion, said to him, 'Noble Son, come to the Blissful Land!' and showed him the path to *Sukhāvātī* with his right hand stretching towards this pure realm.

Based on this myth or legend, all pilgrims make prostrations at this place to wish that they would also receive blessings from this inspirational spot. Next to this place was a cascading waterfall that is believed to be the bathing water of Nam Jom (rNams 'jom khros chu). Pilgrims drink the water and those from remote areas take bottles of the water home with them (Figure 8). Following the path onwards to the east for about two minutes, one reaches the next pilgrimage place, 'the Cemetery Stone' (Dur [khrod] rdo).

\_\_\_ The Cemetery Stone, lying on the ground at the foot of the rocky mountain, is approximately two metres long. Pilgrims lay down on the stone to purify their defilement and make their respective wishes. A monk pilgrim informed me that this stone flew from India (rGya gar). There was a crack on the stone. This crack is believed to be made by an impure woman. Right next to the Cemetery Stone, pilgrims need to ascend to a narrow passage of two rocks. These two rocks are named 'the Stone Passage of the Human Body' (Mi lus rdo phreng) (Figure 14). Then we arrived at the next pilgrimage place.



\_\_\_ ‘The Hole[s] of Liberation from Yama’<sup>47</sup> (Ya ma thar khung), located on the east side above the ‘Stone Passage of the Human Body’, are three detached holes in the middle of the rock. Pilgrims enter each of the holes to drive away bad fortunes (Figure 18). The holes are said to especially aid pilgrims whose children often died. I was informed that in the past, women whose children had died carry their babies inside the caves in order to dispel evil spirits.

\_\_\_ ‘Hell’ (dMyal ba)

After crossing ‘the Caves of Liberation from Yama’, we arrive at a wide open plain. Below the plain lies a long, narrow abyss. This abyss is considered to be Hell. Across the abyss the Lord of the Dead is imprinted in a natural formation. ‘The Pot of the Lord of the Dead’ (gShin rje sla nga) is said to be located at the bottom of the abyss. Spontaneously formed metal chains are hung into the pot. It has been said that bad people will fall into the pot after their death. Pilgrims walk cautiously at the steep place. A pilgrim informed me that the pilgrims should throw stones into the pot. Meanwhile they should say, ‘Now I broke the pot of the Lord of the Dead, and there is no need to break it again in the future’ (*gshin rje sang nga bcag ni min nas, sang phyin chad gcog rgyu med ni min nas*). None of the pilgrims in this team acted in this way or said these words.

Coming back to the open plain, another pilgrimage place, ‘the Weight of the Lord of the Dead’ (gShin rje rgya ma), is located there. It is a giant tree with piles of prayer flags. Pilgrims hold a branch of the tree with their hands, facing ‘the Mirrors of the Lord of the Dead’ (gShin rje me long), which are two open circles on the peak of Drakar Drel dzong (Figure 17). A pilgrim said to me that pilgrims should repeat the following words: ‘Now I weighed the scale of the Lord of the Dead, and there is no need to weigh it again in the future’ (*gshin rje rgya ma tshad ni min nas, sang phyin chad tshad rgyu med ni min nas*). But the pilgrims I was with did not utter these words. About a ten minute walk to the south-east is a place called ‘the Place of the Tamed Female Demon’ (’Dre mo ’dul sa).

\_\_\_ The Place of the Tamed Female Demon

This is the final pilgrimage place, a black earthen tomb which is not included in the circumambulation path. White stones are scattered all over the tomb. This tomb is said to be

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<sup>47</sup> See footnote 23.

that of a ‘demoness’ (*srin mo*), who is believed to have been buried under eighteen layers of earth by Padmasambhava. Thus, she can never rise again to cause harm. When we reached this spot, the pilgrims did not circumambulate the tomb. They simply walked away from the site (Figure 9).

When we left the tomb, I was informed that pilgrims are not allowed to look back until the tomb has faded away from sight. If one turns back to look at the tomb, the demoness will follow that person and cause him or her harm. This length of the path is approximately three to four kilometres and is called ‘the Pass of Cramped Calves’ (*sgyid<sup>48</sup> ‘then la*) since no one is supposed to ever turn back to look at the pile of red earth, but to continue the hike. This tale is only believed by children, and none of the elders appear to believe it. Pilgrims walk towards the narrow, ascending path until they reach the original departure point, the Big Pilgrimage Entrance.

Pilgrimage practices continue at Drakar Drelzong as described above. There are pilgrims of all ages and of different social backgrounds, mainly from remote areas. During the two-months of fieldwork I saw several pilgrims almost every day. But the number of pilgrims was low in 2007 since that year the Great Pilgrimage did not take place; the next Great Pilgrimage will be in 2016. I want to stress that this pilgrimage is a socially organised religious activity in a special time and in a special space. This contradicts Victor Turner’s term of *communitas*, meaning an unstructured community in which people are equal, being in a state of an intense community spirit, the feeling of great social equality, solidarity and togetherness.<sup>49</sup> Here, however, at special occasions like the Great Pilgrimage, pilgrims belong to different groups, sharing shelter and food within fixed groups that mainly consist of relatives and friends. They often do not mix with other groups. Throughout the journey pilgrims of all background, young and old, must for religious reason be independent, and accomplish the journey on one’s own ability. Thus, the quality of *communitas* that Turner (1969, 1974 and 1978) observed in his study on Christian pilgrimages is not present in these pilgrimages.

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<sup>48</sup> This word refers to *sgyid pa*, can be translated as ‘the hollow of a knee or calf of leg’

<sup>49</sup> Turner (1969, p. 132).

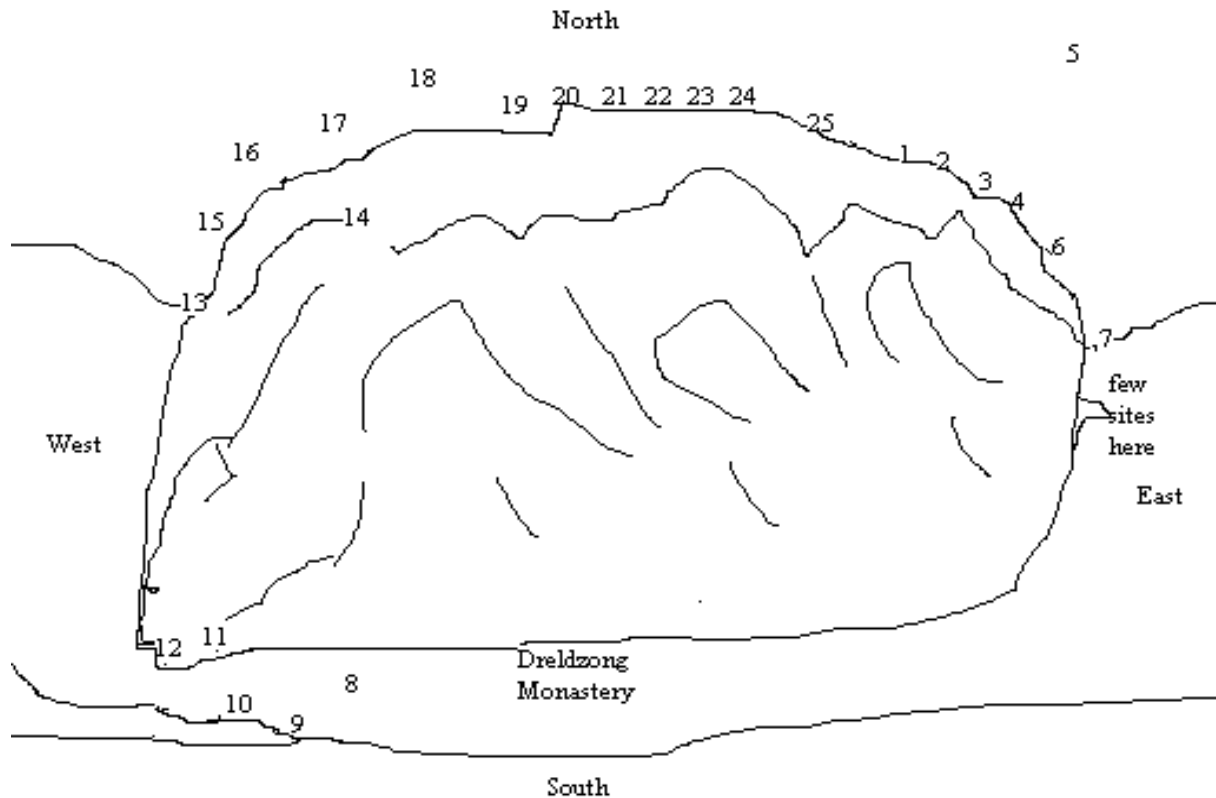


Figure 4: the pilgrim's path around Drakar Drel dzong (sketched by myself).

1. The Big Pilgrimage Entrance (gNas sgo chen mo)
2. The Pure Crystal (Dag pa shel ri)
3. Halls of feast from dākinīs and former lamas' meditation caves
4. Dwelling of the mountain god Nyendrel
5. Tsunmo Maryakma (bTsun mo dmar yag ma)
6. The Path to Vajra Cave (rDo rje phug lam)
7. The Auspicious Pass (bKra shis la)
8. The Tārā Bestowing a Son (sGrol ma'i bu spyin)
9. Male and Female Rivers (Phu chu dang mo chu)
10. The Blue Turquoise Dragon (g.Yu 'brug sngon mo)
11. Repaying Parent's Kindness Site (Pha ma'i drin lan 'jal sa)
12. Hammer of the Lord of the Dead (gShin rje skam pa)
13. Heavenly Pass (mTho ris la)
14. Bodhisattva of Compassion (sPyan ras gzigs)
15. Footprints of King Gesar's dog and horses
16. Prostration Place of the Old Man from Arik (A rig rgan po'i phyag 'tshal sa)
17. Bathing Water of Nam Jom (rNam 'joms khros chu)
18. The Cemetery Stone (Dur [khrod] rdo)
19. The Hole[s] of Liberation from Yama (Ya ma thar khung)
20. Hell (dMyal ba)
21. The Pot of the Lord of the Dead (gShin rje sla nga)
22. The Weight of the Lord of the Dead (gShin rje rgya ma)
23. The Mirrors of the Lord of the Dead (gShin rje me long)
24. The Place of the Tamed Female Demon ('Dre mo 'dul sa)
25. The Pass of Cramped Calves (sGyid 'then la)

### 3.3 Confrontations of the Written Texts and Pilgrimage Practices

The main purpose of this section is to examine whether the written text (the pilgrimage guides) matches the reality of the pilgrimage. To do this, I take my journey to Drakar Drel dzong as a basis and discuss the differences between pilgrimage as portrayed in texts and the contemporary pilgrimage practices at this site.

In order to compare pilgrimage guides and practices I employ the concepts of precept and practice. Precept refers to what people say or write, while practice is what people actually do (Gombrich 1971). A pilgrimage guide functions as a precept that aims to instruct the pilgrims. In other words, it is a prescription that a pilgrim is expected to follow. There are remarkable differences between the world described in the guides and reality. I start with the questions I proposed at the beginning of this chapter: Do the pilgrims actually read the guide books? If they cannot read, are they acquainted with the content? And if so, do they follow the instructions of the guides?

A majority of the pilgrims do not read the guide books. Guide A remains an inaccessible text that is merely read by interested monks and intellectuals. Few local knowledgeable men were acquainted with the content of the guide. During my visit to Drel dzong, the guardian recommended me to read Guide A. According to his account, it is the most 'authentic' pilgrimage guide and he thereby expressed his dissatisfaction with the newly developed guides. Yet, the majority of the pilgrims are from remote nomadic areas with a low literacy rate. Some even do not know of the existence of such a guide. It is difficult to find earlier texts such as Guide A in modern bookstores. I was given one copy of *mDo smad chos 'byung*, where Guide A is quoted, by a Tibetan professor in Ziling, the capital city of Qinghai Province. Traditionally, books were considered sacred, and Tibetans peculiarly revered books written by lamas. Guide A, as we know, was composed by the tantric lama Cheeji Drakba, more than three hundred years ago; it is a sacred written tradition for the local people. However, such traditions are paid less attention in the modern day.

I did not see a pilgrim with the newly developed guides (Guides B, C and D) during the pilgrimage. It seems that the new guides have not gained much attention. Yet, compared with Guide A, these guides have some degree of contact with pilgrims on the ground. They were sold out during the Great Pilgrimage in 2004. Local nomads also buy the video guide. Nomadic regions have solar energy panels that produce power to run lights, charge cell

phones and even provide power for small TV sets. However, the popularity of the new guides is limited to an audience of e.g. elders and religious practitioners. Young people and Tibetans who live in urban areas hardly watch the video guide and read those newly developed guide books.

Notwithstanding the modern guides, pilgrims are generally more comfortable to take the pilgrimage in their traditional fashion that is to learn the content of the guides through oral transmissions and their individual experiences. As the male pilgrim from Chika said, his knowledge about the site comes from former pilgrims and his own experience of the pilgrimage. The texts, thus, shape the behaviour of the pilgrims in a certain way. For instance, places that are associated with Padmasambhava can be found in both written sources and in practice. Pilgrims visit those pilgrimage places like the Path to Vajra Cave where the master is said to have tamed demons, and they offer silk scarves on his alter and prostrate to his image in the cave. And from a pilgrim's point of view, such devotions are dedicated to venerate the great achievement the master had left to the area. The pilgrims receive their knowledge about the connection between this sacred landscape and Padmasambhava from the content of Guide A, which shape their perceptions of the place that is filled with blessings from the master.

However, it is far too simple to generalise and assume that there is consistence between the text and the practice. There are a good many of inconsistencies between what is written in the guide and what pilgrims are doing in reality. In my opinion, the pilgrimage in reality consists of various practices, some of which are local and not referred to in the guide. With 'local' I mean practices that are not found in the early text (Guide A), which mainly describes universal pilgrimage practices related to the basic Buddhist ideas of pursuit of enlightenment through tantric practice on the mountain, and descriptions of pilgrimage places connected to the law of karma. The local elements can be considered practices of various 'nameless religions'<sup>50</sup>, including pilgrimage places for beseeching good fortunes and ferlisations. So there are remarkable discrepancies between the written text and pilgrimage practices. These unwritten and written confrontations warrant further investigation. I presented specific examples in the following passages.

One of the disparities is the choice of pilgrimage route. According to Guide A, the route

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<sup>50</sup> I borrowed the term nameless religion from Stein (1972:192).

should start at the Big Pilgrimage Entrance, where numerous meditation caves are located, including Padmasambhava's cave and the narratives of the conversion of the local gods. The text instructs pilgrims on which places they should first pay homage to at their first visit to the holy mountain. Yet, in pilgrimage practice, there are the two aforementioned choices of pilgrimage routes. Pilgrims follow the Buddhist tradition of progressing clockwise in these two routes, but they are located in two different directions. One is the route located in the east, which Guide A prescribed. The other one is in the south, where Dreltzong Monastery is located. A majority of pilgrims take the latter route. I asked a monk from the monastery about the reasons why many pilgrims take the latter route rather than the route prescribed in Guide A. He replied that it is due to the establishment of the monastery, which is located on the southern side of the mountain. Pilgrims visit the monastery first, and next they take the route that starts from 'the Tārā Bestowing a Son' near the monastery. Visiting the monastery might be the main reason for most pilgrims, but some pilgrims choose to visit first a pilgrimage place that is especially important for them. For example, a pregnant woman may visit the second pilgrimage route first, where the Tārā Bestowing a Son and tsa-tsa piles and male and female rivers are located to ask help for the safe delivery. At that moment this place is more important to her to visit.

Another noticeable disparity is the spiritual realms illustrated in Guide A and the actually visited places. The spiritual realms described in Guide A are related to tantric Buddhism. Sacred mountains in Tibet in particular are perceived as *maṇḍala* of a certain deity (Macdonald 1997). Guide A describes the majority of the pilgrimage places with perceptions of *maṇḍalas* of different meditational deities (*yi dam*), celestial palaces and pure lands, in particular that of Sukhāvātī. However, at the actual pilgrimage sites, pilgrims do not expect to see such sacred realms as they are visualised by spiritually advanced lamas and tantric practitioners. Thus, laymen usually pay less attention to those places, related with high levels of perceptions. During my pilgrimage, I did not meet any pilgrim who told me that he or she had visited such places described above.

In reality, pilgrimage places on the mountain are associated with complex religious practices. They roughly apply to Geoffrey Samuel's (1993) propositions of three orientations of Buddhism: normative, *karmic* and popular. The first orientation addresses the pilgrimage places related to the state of enlightenment and symbolic Buddhist deities. For example, 'the Heavenly Pass' represents the liberation of suffering from this world, with the 49 ladders

symbolising the rebirth or a person having departed this life and beginning a new one. Reaching the Pass resembles the normative practice of the achievement of liberation. Near the Pass, at the peak of the mountain, Chenrezig, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, manifests himself. This peak of the mountain may thus delineate the celestial realm of the Bodhisattvas. The written text (Guide A) stresses the importance of the place in such an idealised normative Buddhist description. Nevertheless, actual pilgrims' practices do not seem to incorporate the Buddhist frame: these are simply termed as popular practices. One can find that apart from the prescribed meaning of the site, on the same mountain pass they practice elements of pre-Buddhist traditions, such as their devotion to the gods by scattering wind-horses and beseeching good fortunes and protection. This does not mean all pilgrims worship the particular and local mountain god of Drakar Drelzong. Their practice can also be explained as worshipping the universal gods, to be seen in all cultural spheres of Tibet. This scattering of wind-horses and asking for protection from gods with total excitement is a usual tradition in reaching a mountain pass. It is particularly interesting to see such phenomena even practised during pilgrimages; it is so widely popular among nomadic Tibetans. In addition, down at the other side of the mountain pilgrims visit the footprints of King Gesar's horse and dog. King Gesar was the main heroic character of the Epic, and a product of laymen's wisdom, originally not having any Buddhist roots. These normative, karmic and popular practices combined together produce a fascinating scenario of complicated practices beyond the written tradition.

The strong connection between pilgrimage practice and local people's lifestyle, as Toni Huber has shown (1999:196), also applies to the pilgrimage at this particular site. During my pilgrimage, I observed several pilgrimage places that are related to the protection of livestock from natural disasters and assistance to stimulate fertility. The Tārā Bestowing a Son and the two male and female rivers are examples of the practice. Traditionally, nomad pilgrims offered piles of clay tablets for beseeching safe delivery for a coming infant, and female pilgrims drink the water from the male and female rivers to nurture the child during their pregnancy. Pilgrims worship the blue turquoise dragon by flicking water into the sky to receive pastoral prosperities to their homes.

The written guides cannot provide the actual behaviours and attitudes of the pilgrims, especially about how they act and what they say at specific places. For example, at the site of Repaying Parents' Kindness, they carry stones and circle around a stone by saying 'Now

(you see) I repaid my parents' kindness, so (you know) I do not need to pay it again in the future'; and then at the Pot of the Lord of the Dead, pilgrims repeat the same patter of interesting words above, 'Now I broke the pot of the Lord of the Dead, and there is no need to break it again in the future', and they threw stones on the ditch indicating they broke the pot of the Lord of The Dead. These words and behaviours, at some point, reflect the moral practices and concerns of their next lives. Yet, these practices that were popular among the laymen were not mentioned in the texts. Such practices, however, continue to decline today. I also found transitions in the behaviour and attitudes among the majority of pilgrims, for example that they skip these behaviours illustrated above.

### **3.4 Pilgrimage in Transition**

Is it meaningful to ask whether there is a growing transitional process occurring in the pilgrimage among the laymen? It is true that local people are faithful followers of Buddhism and religion still is a living tradition in the area. Pilgrims chant *mantras* on a pilgrimage; I also met one pilgrim doing full length prostration along the circumambulation path, and four tantric religious practitioners conducting a retreat and around three hundred monks studying Buddhism at Drel dzong Monastery.

However, the practice of pilgrimage to Drakar Drel dzong underwent various changes in the last decade. Not only do the pilgrims not follow the written tradition of Guide A, but they do not follow the oral prescriptions either. There are behaviours and attitudes that are not consistent with the conventional norms. Even nomads and devotional elders who continuously practice pilgrimage do not follow all the precepts. There are also pilgrims who simply walk around the mountain quickly and head for home to do practical work. During my pilgrimage, I observed pilgrims who did not act out their physical worships, such as repeating a pattern of words described above and carrying or throwing a stone at specific places where this is supposed to be done. A very important remark was made by some of the pilgrims that in the past, pilgrims had such and such behaviour and said such and such words; they referred to certain behaviours and attitudes as a past practice, not the present one.

Pilgrims discredit the oral traditions, such as the legends of the mountain gods and the Old Man from Arik. In particular, the place called the Place of the Tamed Female Demon is not included in the circumambulation path. Pilgrims do not pay special attention to the place and simply walk away. A pilgrim told me that in the past, pilgrims threw white stones on the tomb



and spat on it to restrain the rise of the female demon. He also told me that ‘the Pass of Cramped Calves’ is named after the legend and is an exciting tale for children. Neither have I seen any pilgrims, except children, who reacted to the place; they just visit it and walk on normally.

The practice of pilgrimage is declining among the young generation in the area, in particular among the educated ones. I interviewed five young college students, three boys and two girls, who had grown up in adjacent nomadic villages and now receive modern education in urban areas. I asked how many times they made a pilgrimage to Drakar Drel dzong. Only two of them (one girl and one boy) made a pilgrimage during the Great Pilgrimage of 2004. None of them have much interest in making a pilgrimage. Instead, they are more concerned about their further education and job opportunities.

### **3. 5 Modernisation around Drakar Drel dzong**

#### *Construction*

The government of China undertakes numerous projects, among these was a programme to develop the western regions (Chin: Xi bu da ka fa) inaugurated by Jiang Zemin in 1999. One of the projects is to build roads and develop new towns for nomads. Drakar Drel dzong is included in the projects by the local county government. A new public road was built from the local town of Xinghai to Drakar in 2007. The area has had electricity since 2004. There is a growing new town with about twenty flat houses at the foot of the mountain nearby the monastery. This town has a small market of shops, restaurants and hostels owned by local Tibetans and a few Chinese. In 2004, the new town was filled with pilgrims. Still, in 2007 few pilgrims from remote areas found their lodgings in the town. Nearby nomads still live far from the mountain and they do not frequently visit this new town for shopping. It is, however, a popular place for monks and pilgrims to buy food and other products.

#### *A Secularised Ritual*

In 2007 I observed a modern horse race festival at dawn at Drakar Drel dzong lead by adjacent nomadic groups from Chuzang, Nadung and Drel tang after completing a *latse* ritual to the mountain god Nyendrel. It is striking to see the secularised entertainment. Young men ride their horses with fine decorations (Figure 27) . According to a local informant, the number of horses is yearly decreasing since more and more nomads sell their horses, as they prefer modern means of transportation. These days, most of the horses are not used for

transportation like in the old days, but only for special local occasions such as horse races and other festivals. Nomads, both young and old and male and female, put on their finest clothes and ornaments to watch the horse race led mostly by young men (Figure 29). They come by motorcycles with wives and children on the back. During the festival a large number of jeeps and motorcycles are parked along the river (Figure 22).

The day was a luxurious recreational day for monks at Drel dzong Monastery. Monastery tents were put up, with one huge tent for all the monks, while several other small ones were pitched for the thirteen reincarnated lamas living near the monastery. The recreation consisted of modern sports like football and basketball. A square, made up of ropes dotted with small varicoloured flags, had been prepared in the middle of the plain along with two basketball hoops right beside the football square. Young monks played football; while some played basketball and tennis (Figure 28). Is this a deterioration of the culture and traditional way of life?

#### *Tourist Initiations*

In April 2008, Drakar Drel dzong was officially announced as a sacred site and a tourist centre by the government of Qinghai Province<sup>51</sup>. Tourism developers attempt to ‘re-sacralise’ the site along their image of Shangri-la<sup>52</sup>, i.e. an image of Tibet as a sacred realm and Tibetans as completely devoted to religion, a fantasy developed in the West, but one that is also maintained by segments of the Chinese and the exile Tibetan population. Contemporary Chinese tourist entrepreneurs emphasise words like ‘holiness’ (Chinese: *sheng sheng*), ‘miracles’ (*sheng qi*) and ‘mystery’ (*sheng mi*) to attract tourists<sup>53</sup>. I did not see any Chinese or Western tourists in 2007. However, in the increasingly market-oriented China, pilgrimage sites are among the main attractions for urban Chinese tourists (Kolås 2008:126). How would the pilgrimage at Drakar Drel dzong be like after the execution of these new policies?

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<sup>51</sup> See <http://www.qhxx.gov.cn/html/lvyouziyuan>, [http://www.amdotibet.com/cn/travel/xianlu/2007/11/amdotibet\\_15211371.htm](http://www.amdotibet.com/cn/travel/xianlu/2007/11/amdotibet_15211371.htm) [in the bibliography].

<sup>52</sup> Shangri-la is the fictional utopian land in James Hilton’s *Lost Horizon*. In 2001 a place called Zhongdian in Yunnan Province was renamed as Shangri-la, a mainly Tibetan county offering gorgeous countryside and landscape.

<sup>53</sup> See <http://www.xinghainews.com/system/2008/04/18/002486774.shtml> [in the bibliography].

**Part Two: Pilgrimage Places at Drakar Dredzong**



From left to right, the first row: Figure 7, 8; the second row: Figure 9, 10; the third row: Figure 11, 12.

**Part Three: Pilgrimage places at Drakar Dredzong**



From left to right: the first row Figure 13, 14; the second row Figure 15, 16, 17; the third row Figure 18.

**Part Four: Surrounding Atmosphere at Drakar Drelzong**



From left to right: the first row Figure 19, 20; the second row Figure 21; the third row Figure 22, 23.

**Part Five: Surrounding Atmosphere at Drakar Dredzong**



From left to right: the first row Figure 24, 25, 26; the second row Figure 27, 28 29.

## **Conclusion**

The primary sources I have used to analyse pilgrimage to Drakar Dreldzong are: an early pilgrimage guide (Guide A) composed sometime in the early/mid 17<sup>th</sup> century; three recently developed pilgrimage guides (Guides B, C and D) written and released by contemporary Tibetan lay intellectuals and monks in 2004; and data collected during fieldwork about the reality of pilgrimage to the site today. Based on these various sources of data, we find that the conception of pilgrimage has changed somewhat from the early or mid 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present time. These different understandings of pilgrimage to Drakar Dreldzong are represented by a variety of participants: Buddhist tantric practitioners (i.e. the author of Guide A), lay intellectuals (i.e. editors of Guide B), monks (authors of Guide C) and pilgrims. In the following I will make some concluding remarks on pilgrimage to Drakar Dreldzong as it has been presented in the different guides (A, B, C and D) and pilgrimage practice as it is carried out in the contemporary setting.

### ***Concluding Remarks on Guide A***

Guide A reflects the perceptions of a religious intellectual's way of introducing a holy mountain three hundred years ago. We learnt that the mountain was most likely associated with Nyingma and Kagyulba religious practices, since there were frequent narrations about Padmasambhava as a religious hero. Furthermore, the background of the author was Drigung Kagyulba lineage. Interesting to notice for comparative purposes is also that many of the hermits who came to the three holy mountains of Tise, Labshi and Tsari since the early twelfth century mainly belonged to the above schools.

In terms of language and style, Guide A is written in short verses that probably reflect an Indic Buddhist origin, and there is frequent use of Sanskrit terminology and doctrines. It emphasises basic Buddhist ideas about enlightenment and spiritual realisation achieved through meditation and retreat. There is also frequent mention of positive karmic result, merit accumulation and purification of defilements that can be obtained by visiting the specific places on the mountain. Guide A demonstrates how the site became sacred and describes pilgrimage places associated with Buddhist tantric ideology and symbols. The preliminary section deals with an account of the process of the empowerment inaugurated by the master Padmasambhava, a typical depiction in many Tibetan pilgrimage guides. And this part attempts to justify Buddhist legitimating of the mountain by presenting the taming of local

gods and consecration of the place. Guide A contains illustrations of the places connected with the Buddhist tantras. According to the text, pilgrimage places are conceived as *maṅḍalas* and celestial palaces, and Buddhist deities are supposed to be naturally formed in different locations of the mountain.

The most important part of Guide A is aimed at its preferred readers, i.e. mainly Buddhist intellectuals, especially tantric practitioners. The perceptions of particular geographical locations as *maṅḍalas* are available only through extraordinary spiritual visions obtained at certain levels of spiritual progress and realisations. Only tantric adepts and lamas could obtain such perceptions according to the Buddhist point of view. Thus it is difficult for laymen and common people to see these highest goal-oriented perceptions as the text describes; still these esoteric descriptions are there in Guide A as a normative goal for every Buddhist practitioner. Through the mention of merit accumulation and cleansing of defilements, there is also something in the Guide for the ordinary practitioners and thus a notion of spiritual hierarchy which is also a standard way of introducing holy places in Tibetan pilgrimage guides.

### ***Concluding Remarks on the New Guides***

The new guides reflect an evolution in the perception of pilgrimage sites developed by contemporary lay intellectuals and monks. In comparison with Guide A, the new guides show a transformation of how the pilgrimage site is conceived, alterations that can be explained by social and cultural changes since the late seventeenth century and up till today.

The new guides demonstrate the new generations' way of introducing Drakar Drelzong, reflecting the present situation. The contemporary way of writing pilgrimage guides to the site show different perspectives; one is that of lay intellectuals. Unlike in the old society, where pilgrimage guides were written by religious intellectuals, the style and content of the contemporary guides (Guides B and D) show the active participation of laymen who have received a modern education. We may assume that their motivations are generally a result of their dissatisfaction with the early guide (i.e. Guide A), since the early text is only partly meaningful and practical to the contemporary pilgrims. It appears that the primary concerns of the modern writers are to give an outlet to their national consciousness and their desire to preserve folk traditions that are fading in modern days.

Meanwhile, Guide C reflects the contemporary monks' objections to pilgrimage practice on



the mountain. Monks at Dreltzong Monastery regard the holy mountain as part of their tradition; traditionally the mountain was located within the sphere of influence of the monastery. In addition, the former Lama Arol's achievements have increased the monks' pride and associations with the holy mountain. I assume that the monks' participation in the production of the new guides reflects their intellectual competence and advertisement of the place to all background of visitors, both religious and secular. Lay people and monks have these different orientations in presenting the guides. The former attempt to provide information about every place and event connected with the site in an open and straightforward mode, while the latter systematise the site and introduce economic concerns. The monks' orientation is shown in the categorisation of 18 pilgrimage places, and the translation of the guide with other languages. This categorisation, I believe, was made by the authors to demonstrate the significance of the places according to Buddhist values. This is how the monks' views are reflected in the texts. And they employ Chinese translations to attract a broad circle of readers. It is also the case that many Chinese are becoming increasingly interested in Buddhism, and their visit to the mountain may reflect a combination of modern tourism and religious aspirations.

Guide D, the video guide, released by lay popular singers, lay lyric composers and the young Lama Arol, represents a dramatic change of Tibetan pilgrimage literature. The actors or producers seem determined to change the traditional style in order to adapt the contemporary pilgrimage practice to the modern world. Three components, namely narration, songs and scenery, are the major ingredients in the video guide and reflect the dynamic conception of pilgrimage among the new generation.

### **Concluding Remarks on Contemporary Pilgrimage Practice**

Pilgrimage at Drakar Dreltzong is largely practiced by laymen from remote nomadic areas. In my observation of pilgrimage to the mountain, I discovered that the written pilgrimage guides do not describe the full complexity of Amdovans' veneration of the mountain, and there are many of discrepancies between the various texts and reality. While the texts mainly concentrate on the Buddhist interpretation of the mountain, the pilgrims also retell ancient myths and legends that appear to have pre-Buddhist roots, and they venerate the ancient 'owners of the mountain' (the *gzhi bdag* or the *yul lha*). A majority of lay pilgrims do not read the texts, and they follow the oral traditions that clearly mix Buddhist and pre-Buddhist religious conceptions. Several pilgrimage places they visit and deities they propitiate are not

described in the guides.

The contemporary pilgrimage practice is undergoing a process of transition. Pilgrims' behaviour and attitudes towards specific places are changing quickly, and this is also reflected in the modern guides. There are pilgrims who do not follow the prescribed behaviour in the guides. The number of pilgrims is declining among the young generation who are more engaged in practical, goal-oriented things like education and lay careers. Still, the pilgrims to Drakar Drel dzong continue to perform according to a well-established cultural pattern that combines pre-Buddhist and Buddhist elements, but which has rapidly adapted to the needs of modernity.

Based on the three sources, namely the early guide, the newly developed ones and the actual practice of the pilgrimage at Dragkar Drel dzong in the modern day, we can clearly see a process of transition that is the result of a marked social change. Drakar Drel dzong was officially opened by the provincial Government of Qinghai as a tourist centre in 2008. As the tourist industry grows and population mobility increases from outside and inside of the area, further transformations in the conception and practice of pilgrimage to Dragkar Drel dzong are bound to happen. A more thorough analysis of the contemporary tourism/pilgrimage at Drakar Drel dzong in combination with a larger comparative analysis of similar developments elsewhere in Amdo would certainly yield interesting results, but is outside the scope of this thesis.

## **Bibliography**

### **Transliteration and Tibetan forms of Phoneticised Tibetan Terms**

I assign phonetic spellings close to the Amdo nomadic dialect spoken around Drakar Drel dzong areas to the names of persons, places and objects. Such phonetics is far from the ‘standard’ or ‘correct’ spellings that are based on the dialects in Central Tibet and Himalayan regions, since Tibetan dialects have considerable regional variations, though all share the same written system. Local people and intellectuals pronounce the names of words according to their respective dialects. For instance, in the nomadic areas around Drel dzong, people pronounce the letter ‘pha’ as ‘ba’, ‘ba’ as ‘wa’ and the suffix ‘sa’ as the English vowel ‘i’: which I consistently replace with ‘ee’ as similar to the pronunciation of English words such as ‘sheep’. I endeavoured to maintain the spelling of the terms as close to the actual local people’s spoken language as consistently possible.

Amchok

A mchog

Achung Namdzong

A chung gNam rdzong

Aku Trotung

A khu Khro thung

Amdowa

A mdo ba

Amye Machen

A myes rMa chen

Arol Lobzang Gelek Zangwo

A rol bLo bzang dGe legs bZang bo

Arol Lobzang Lungtok Tanbe Gyaltzen

A rol bLo bzang Lung rtogs bsTan pa’i rGyal mtshan

Banlhun

Pad lhun

Badzong

’Ba’ rdzong

Belmo Drak

sPel mo Brag

Cheeyang Dorje	Chos dbyangs rDo rje
Chenrezig	sPyan ras gzigs
Chika	Khri ka
Chuzang	Chu bzang
Chuzang Drakar	Chu bzang Brag dkar
Dakba Shri	Dag pa Shri'i
Deemo Dzong	'Dus mo rDzong
Domel	mDo smad
Dorje Lokar	rDo rje kLo dkar
Dorje Lokar Salwa	rDo rje kLo dkar gSal ba
Drakgon Konchok Tenba Rabjee	Brag dgon dKon mchog bTsan pa Rab rgyas
Drakar Dreldzong	Brag dkar sPrel rdzong
Drakar Dreldzong Teesam Yondhan Ling	Brag dkar sPrel rdzong Thos bsam Yon tan gLing
Drangmar Ma	Brang dmar Ma
Dreldzong Drak	sPrel rdzong Brag
Dreldzong Gomba Dodam Lhankang	sPrel rdzong dGon pa Do tam Lhan khang
Dreltang	sPrel thang

Drigung Henyon Cheeji Drakba      'Bri gung dBu smyon Chos kyi Grags pa

Drigung Jikten Sumgon      'Bri gung 'Jig rten gSum mgon

Dromtonba      'brom ston pa

Dulbe      bDud bhe

*dunglen*      *rdung len*

Gelukba      dGe lugs pa

Gyatsa      rGya tsha

Kadamba      bKa' gdams pa

Kagyul      bKa' rgyud

Labrang      bLa brang

Labshi      La phyi

Lhade      lHa sde

Lugi Gyal      Lu gu rGyal

Nakza      Nag za

Nezhi Drubchen      gNas bzhi Grub chen

Ngadung      rNga rdung

Nyendrel Dawa Chenbo      gNyen sprel Zla ba Chen po

Nyingmaba	rNying ma pa
Machen Bomra	rMa chen sPom ra
Marba	Mar pa
Milareba	Mi la ras pa
Padamba Sanjee	Pha dam pa Sang rgyas
Pula Yangdzong	Phu la Yang rdzong
Purwa	Phur ba
Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdrol	Zhab dkar Tshogs drug Rang drol
Samdrub Tsering	bSam grub Tshe ring
Sangjee Gyatso	Sang rgyas rGya mtsho
Shawa Ridzong	Shwa ba Ri rdzong
Shingchong Ralwajen	Zhing skyong Ral ba can
Tise	Ti se
Tsangnyon	gTsang smyon
Tsari	rTsa ri
Tsolho	mTsho lho
Tsongkhaba	Tsong kha pa

Tsongon Nangtan Tuntsok      mTsho sngon Nang bstan mThun tshogs

Trishok Gyalmo      Khri gshog rGyal mo

Wardo      Bar do

Yangdzong      Yang rdzong

Yermo Tang      g.Yer mo Thang

Yeshe Tsogyal      Ye shes mTsho rgyal





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